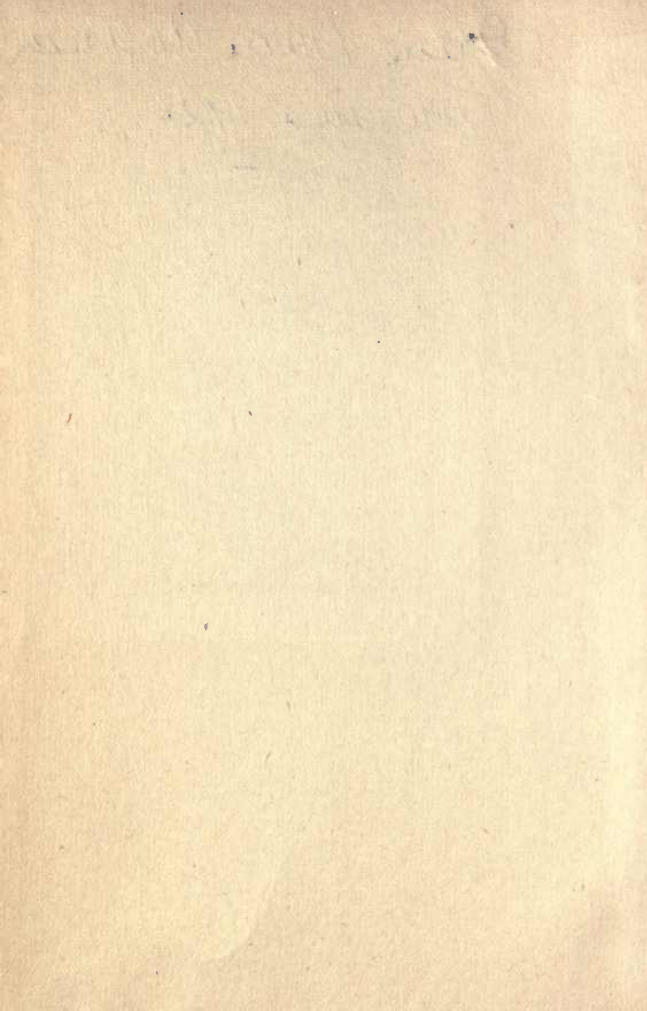
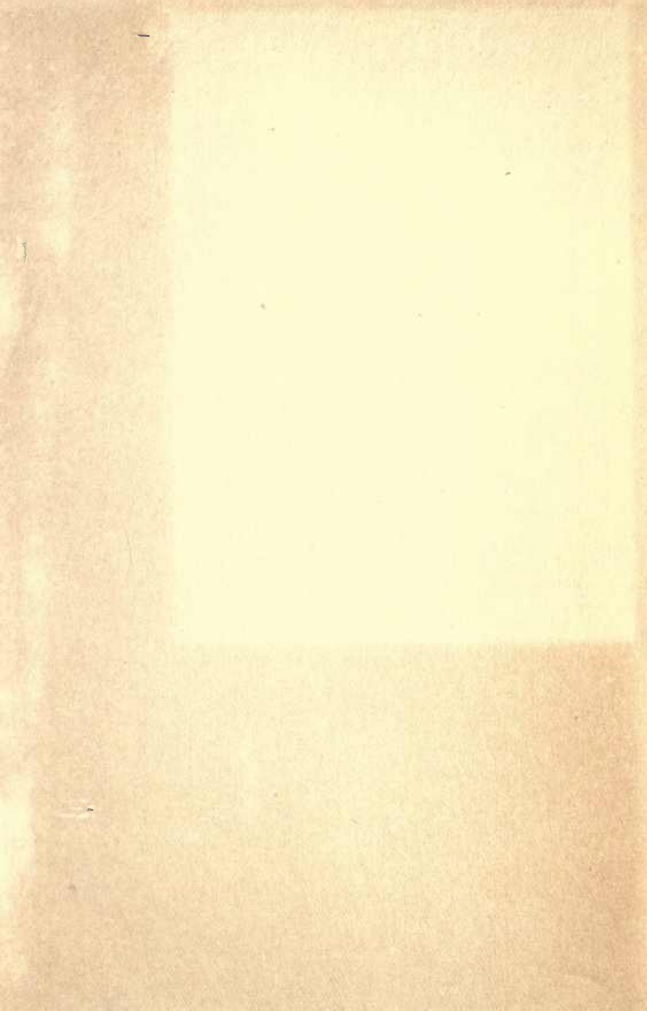




IRENE DWEN ANDREWS

~~Gene Owen Andrews~~
Dublin. 1924





THE GAEL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IRISH ECLOGUES

SIR HORACE PLUNKETT AND HIS
PLACE IN THE IRISH NATION

SELF-GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS
INTERESTS

THE GAEL

EDWARD E. LYSAGHT

MAUNSEL & COMPANY, LTD.
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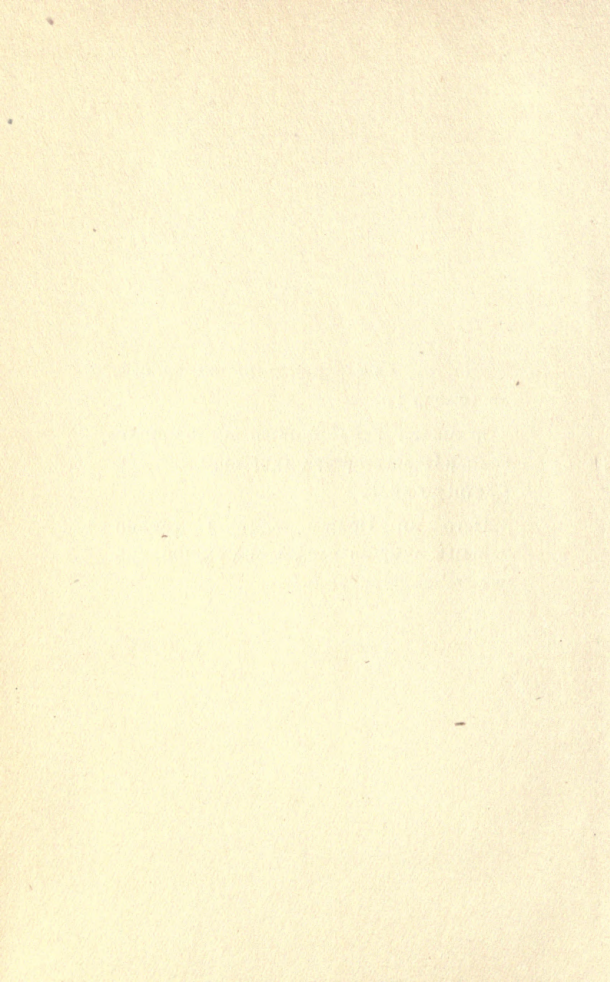
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Duit-re, a feargair, a mhic mo éiríde,
an leabhar ro.

Ir aic an rgeal é mire as bhionnao
leabhar béarla oir-ra asur tura san aet
gaeoilge asat.

Beir an béarla asat i gceann
tamail asur an raogal atá asainn, aet
ir dem' éasmair-re é.



THE GAEL

CHAPTER I

Like most men, Con O'Hickie was unable to throw off the fascination of thinking in bed when anything unusually interesting was in his mind. Having from time to time tried the expedients of counting sheep as they jumped a low wall, brushing his hair and teeth, and repeating mechanically as much as he could remember of some poem he learned at school, he eventually abandoned the attempt, and turned on to his back with the avowed intention of thinking the matter to a conclusion : not till then could he sleep.

To understand the problem which exercised the mind of Con O'Hickie, as he lay on his back in bed in one of the top rooms of a Fitzwilliam Square house, it is necessary to know something of Con O'Hickie himself.

Con was at that time twenty-two. His father had died six years before, in 1899. Except for visits to his uncle in Dublin, a fashionable surgeon in whose house he now was, the first sixteen years of his life had been spent in England, but in an atmosphere of the most perfervid Fenianism which enforced exile had fostered in his father. Mr. O'Hickie had inherited, and hoped to bequeath to his son Con, a longing to regain a property in the southern part of County Galway from which his family had been expatriated in the past, together with a hatred of England as strong as it was unreasoning. This passion of his was, however,

entirely ineffective, since it gave him no greater satisfaction than voting for a timid Gladstonian in the two Home Rule elections ; though it had one very positive effect, for his wife, once an amiable and mildly patriotic Kerry girl, had become so weary of his insistence at all seasons upon matters Irish, to the exclusion of every other subject of interest to dwellers in England, that less than a year after Mr. O'Hickie's death, she married a Tory pressman of very definitely anti-Irish proclivities.

Con at sixteen had been at once fired and amused by his father's vigorous views. His school life at Stoneyhurst had brought him in touch with Irish boys who were not Fenians, and had given him a rest from his father's intransigence. At eighteen he entered Trinity and there experienced three pleasant years of University life, though academically his career was quite colourless. His first problem had confronted him then : his future. £7,000, which brought him £300 a year, did not seem to justify him in leading a lazy life. Canada had been his choice, *faute de mieux* : the possession of some capital and a great love of an open-air existence had decided him. Preparatory to making the somewhat violent wrench involved in actually crossing the Atlantic he had decided to go for a year to a gentleman farmer in County Waterford who advertised himself as a teacher of farming. This decision, while comfortably putting off the fatal day of making the plunge, also gave him a gratifying sense of mastership over his own destiny, of manhood, in fact.

That year in turn was now over. The "gentleman farmer," whose so-called pupil Con had been, had taught him little or nothing, his object having been to take his money, and at the same time make use of him as an extra hand during the busy times of the agricul-

tural year, leaving him to his own devices when there was no urgent need of men. None the less, Con had acquired a considerable amount of useful knowledge. He had surprised himself by the energy with which he had worked both with his hands and with his head. Though his father had been perforce a townsman, from the families of both his parents he had evidently inherited a natural love of the country and an instinct for dealing with land and animals.

The time had now come when he must buy his ticket and voyage away into the unknown. Though the adventure of such a step would have kindled in him a feeling of excitement, would perhaps have made him dream of strange happenings, and would have produced in him when he woke in the morning that intangible and indefinite sense of something impending which comes to us all at times in the first moments of consciousness after sleep, it would not have kept him awake for a minute.

It was indecision and the fascination of an entirely new idea which made sleep impossible to Con. The adventure of Canada became dull when compared with the one that now seemed to offer itself to him. The log shaks of the prairies and the Rockies were as nothing to the castles he was now, half against his will, building in the air.

His uncle had mentioned at dinner that Rathcarrig was in the market, and it had flashed upon him that there was at least a possibility, if he cared to take it, of realizing his father's dream.

Until that evening Rathcarrig had been no more than a name to Con, for his father's rhapsodies used to go in at one ear and out at the other, and since his death Con had forgotten even the few facts about it which had at one time been in his mind. So it was

with mild interest that he had asked his uncle to tell him something about the place.

Dr. O'Hickie's excursions into family history and recollections of the home that had long ago passed out of their hands had left a fairly clear impression on Con's mind, and one which did not closely correspond with the glowing and imaginative accounts he had heard from his father in his schooldays.

It appeared that it was about a hundred and fifty years since the O'Hickies had been in Rathcarrig. It had passed through various hands in the interim, and was now derelict for twenty years, though Dr. O'Hickie could remember the days when it had been well kept up by its last owner.

"I suppose the land has been let to the wild men of the district," Con remembered his uncle's remark, "while the house has been gradually falling down. The river is as perfect as anything in Ireland, and there used to be decent shooting in the woods. Of course, all the poachers of the county have had it to themselves for so long that there can be nothing left to shoot. As likely as not the neighbours have cut down the very woods themselves for fuel and fencing posts. That's just what will make such a fine place as Rathcarrig go for next to nothing. As a matter of fact, with the house in such a bad condition there will probably be no buyer or tenant. Eventually the place will fall into the hands of the neighbouring farmers altogether."

There burned in Con a slumbering passion for Ireland, and, though it was no more than an emotion and he had never embraced any political creed or thought out any definite way of serving his country, he felt none the less in leaving Ireland a feeling of sadness which was more poignant than the twinges

caused by parting from his friends and familiar haunts. He began to think now, too, that Canada offered him very little scope for ambition of any kind. Why should he not work the land as well in Ireland as in Canada, and remain in his own country instead of swelling the annual list of emigrants? He was, in fact, irresistibly attracted by the idea of buying Rathcarrig. Having once admitted the possibility of doing so, he could not stem the flow of plans and hopes which surged through his brain. With a reckless impetuosity in which he revelled he decided that he would buy Rathcarrig and farm it as it had never been farmed before. Sleep came then unsought, and the sunlight coming in through the open unshuttered window was powerless to wake him until, six hours later, Dr. O'Hickie's doleful butler informed him that it was nine o'clock.

Overnight resolves are often weakened and dreams dissipated by the clear cold light of the morning sun. Man is never more self-critical, never less romantic, than when he is shaving before breakfast. Con was conscious of this as he dressed, and, finding somewhat to his own surprise that the enthusiasm of the small hours was still untempered by misgivings, he felt strengthened in his resolution to buy Rathcarrig.

His uncle had left the house before Con went in to breakfast. He was glad of this, for he was full of his project, and he was anxious to say nothing about it until he had taken some definite steps to carry it out.

Con walked slowly through Stephen's Green to the offices of Mr. Kirby, the solicitor in charge of the sale of Rathcarrig. An office boy gave him a chair in the outer room and handed him a paper, which he scanned dully, as one glances at the pages of *Punch* in a dentist's waiting-room. The boy continued his occupation of flicking the tin deed-boxes with a perfunctory duster.

He did not trouble to look twice at the early visitor, for he had called without previously making an appointment, and there was nothing in his appearance to attract attention at the first glance. To the lawyer's junior clerk he seemed a very ordinary young man : tall, of fair physique, and rather jolly countenance and black hair

Mr. Kirby bustled into the room about half-past-ten. His opening remark, when he received Con in his parchment sanctum, was not encouraging.

" Well, my young man, what can I do for you ? "

" I want to know " replied Con, in the most business-like tone he could command, " the acreage, condition, and price of Rathcarrig, the place you advertise for sale near Killeely."

" For whom do you want this information ? " enquired Mr. Kirby without enthusiasm. He had no hope of disposing of this property to an individual, and looked forward to a bad bargain with the Congested Districts Board as the best he was likely to do for his clients.

" As a matter of fact," replied Con awkwardly, as if the actual statement of his intention surprised himself as much as the old solicitor, " I am thinking of buying the place myself if it suits me. My name is O'Hickie ; at one time the place belonged to my family."

" That is so, certainly, Mr O'Hickie," said the lawyer, with less superiority of manner. He now looked at Con with some interest, and noticed that the commonplace youth of his first impression had firm lines about the mouth and chin. He also thought he saw in Con's grey eyes something in which a physiologist might have professed to detect more than ordinary spirit. " Speaking from memory," he continued in his dry, business-like manner, " Rathcarrig

contains 527 statute acres. It is demesne land, but sold to the Land Commission with the rest of the estate, and now subject to an annuity of £110 a year. My clients are expecting £2,000. As to the present condition of the place, it is of no use my over-praising it—a fine place, a very fine place, but sadly neglected of late years.”

Details and maps were produced and Con became more and more fascinated with the idea of making a home and a career for himself in the West. The maps somehow filled him with an ancestral feeling he had not known before, and he began to understand his father's passionate desire for the soil which had been tilled generations ago by his ancestors.

“At least it will do no harm for me to see the place myself,” he said at length, as he rose to leave the office ; and he hurried off to buy a twopenny railway guide.

CHAPTER II

That Con would buy Rathcarrig was inevitable. Over-caution is not a characteristic highly developed in young men of Con's type, and he was not of the kind to turn aside from an adventure. The project had taken hold of his imagination, and the future, at least while it was still remote, seemed to be invested with almost romantic possibilities.

He had, however, in no way lost his head ; he had inspected the lands with care, and his training with the Waterford farmer gave him a superficial knowledge which he felt to be the nucleus of an expert opinion. He could not deny to himself that the farm was in a very bad state, but the latent possibilities of fields impoverished by rabbits, and the very low purchase money and annuity gave him heart for an undertaking which, even with his impulsive confidence in himself as a farmer, he admitted to be a heavy one, and which the old man who had wonderingly accompanied him from field to field frankly told him was madness.

"There'll nothing ever grow in Rathcarrig but rabbits and fur' bushes," was his remark when asked his opinion. In short, though in the purchase of Rathcarrig Con kept and used his head well enough for an inexperienced youth, he had lost his heart to the place before ever he signed the documents in Mr. Kirby's office ; and when his heart was in a thing Con was not wont over-carefully to count the cost.

One fine evening at the end of October 1905, Con

saw his two boxes hoisted on to an outside car at Keownstown station, and squeezed himself behind one of them for his twelve mile drive. He was nervous and excited, and he already felt that he was a fool not to have gone to Canada ; any adventure would be less a voyage into the unknown than this. For the first mile he took very little notice of anything, his mind was too much occupied in aimlessly wondering what he should do when he arrived at Rathcarrig. But if he did not observe the driver—a sufficiently striking figure : a big man nearly a horse-load in himself—the driver was observing him with great interest. The man's satisfaction at being the first to become acquainted with the individual whose coming had been the subject of curious speculation for the whole district would have been evident to anyone but to the object of it. Rumour, whose birthplace must surely have been somewhere in the remoter parts of Ireland, had thriven well on Con O'Hickie, and had described him variously as an English Unionist politician, a Dublin doctor with a shady past, and the son of one of the Fenian martyrs. Rumour convinces no one in Munster and Connacht, but she stimulates curiosity to a remarkable degree. Tom Owens was, like everyone else, exceedingly interested in the unknown purchaser of Rathcarrig, and he had wanted no encouragement from his wife to drive the car himself, though he had a man in the yard with nothing particular to do that day.

“ 'Tis a grand day, Mr O'Hickie,” said Tom after a while.

“ It is,” said Con, absentmindedly, without looking up.

“ The people has the spuds dug very early ; 'tis the best year came this long time, thank God,” continued Tom Owens

"Yes?" said Con.

'Gwan ou' o' that, said Tom to his horse, and flicked him with his whip, as he reflected that the new-comer did not seem communicative.

After a pause he said half-musingly, "You're a very young man entirely, anyway."

Con awoke with a start and looked at Tom. He was surprised to find that he had a friendly face; just then he had been feeling that everyone must regard him with distrust, as an enemy and a stranger in their midst.

"What's the harm in being young?" said Con. "There's many a man wishes he was younger."

"That's a fact," agreed Tom, "but all the same for that I'd make so bold as to say you're a trifle young to be after buying Rathcarrig, and you a stranger to the place."

"Well, I did, anyhow," returned Con. "You talk as though a man would want to be as old as Methusalem to buy it and as rich as Croesus."

"'Tis not for what it cost; though dear knows you must have paid a big lump of money for it, crag and all that it is. 'Tis the way it's such a wild, backward place for a man that does be accustomed to the city; and there's a wild class of fellows about that part, too, as sure as there's salmon in the river."

The indefinite suggestiveness of the latter part of Tom Owens' sentence annoyed Con subconsciously, but he felt that there was a definite charge against him in the first part, and he flared up, for he was often unreasonably touchy, and had yet to learn that touchiness is foolish in dealing with people like Tom Owens.

"Is it from a city you say I am?" he exclaimed, speaking now more in the manner of the people, a trick he had learnt in County Waterford, and which

he fell into unconsciously when at all excited. "I tell you I'm no city man, and what's more, I'm as well able to plough, or milk, or fork hay, as the next man."

"Be the hoky good jewel," laughed Tom, "'tis the hard work you'll get ploughing Rathcarrig, I'm thinking, if that's what you intend doing with it. Now, 'tis my opinion that it's game you should rear in it, not cattle and spuds, if ever you're able to keep out the Kildeely lads that do be hunting and trapping in it day and night."

"I wonder is there enough in it to make it worth their while," said Con

"Enough, is it?" replied Tom, "why, 'twould make you laugh to hear the row there was between the boys from Kildeely and the Keownstown lads on the head of that. 'Tis counted the best poaching ground within the four seas of Ireland, and one day when it was known that a pair of young fellows from Keownstown had snares set in the upper part of Rathcarrig demesne the prime boys of Kildeely waited for them the very same as peelers or woodrangers. They caught 'em, and they after snaring a couple of rabbits, and be jabers they beat the devil out of them and pitched 'em home without so much as the tail end of a rabbit."

Con had no suitable reply to this. He felt he had heard enough for one day, and he drew the driver's attention to a large house between them and the river, just visible among the trees. In answer to his questions Tom Owens started off very willingly on a subject quite as interesting to him as the Kildeely poachers.

"Mr. Willoughby is the gentleman's name that owns that place. It used to be called Glenowan long 'go, but at the time of his marrying Mrs. Willoughby, they altered the name to Rivervale, and that's the name that's on it this thirty years. He's a real landlord, but

he's a gentleman, and he keeps up his place in fine style, like the old times. 'Tis a different story with Rathcarrig and the bulk of the places in this county."

"I know Rathcarrig's in a bad way," said Con, "but is there no other property decently kept up besides Rivervale."

"Well, in the first place, sir, there's not a whole lot of places in it to be kept up. Mr. Fitzgerald's place, of course, that's at Fitzgeraldstown. a long way beyond Killeely, that's a well-kept place enough, not but what 'twould be twice as good if Mr. Fitzgerald spent less of his money giving it away, for 'tis little enough he has, the dear man, I believe."

"Surely Mr. Keane of Gortroe has a nice place. He's the only person I know anything of in this part of the world."

"Yerra, sure, Gortroe is no more than a strong farmer's place; himself is a decent poor man."

By this time they had come to a sharp hill, and Con, feeling none too warm, got off the car to walk. Behind him lay a valley enclosed by a craggy, mountainy country, but the valley itself fertile and fairly level, for the road they had travelled from Keownstown ran for the first five miles close to the bank of the river. The hill they were climbing brought them to the top of a spur of the mountains, and as Con mounted the car he saw before him again the river, now broad and slow-running, with an island here and there dividing it into two streams; beyond it a flat, green plain hemmed in by more mountains on the northern horizon.

Another twenty minutes brought them to the lodge gate of Rathcarrig—the lodge itself was in ruins. Con had been there before not a month earlier, but as he drove down the avenue and saw the long green strips

of grass which always grow on roads where traffic is infrequent ; as he passed through the furze-covered fields, and from them to the gloomy woods and the great, gaunt, empty house, his heart sank to its lowest, and he felt he was indeed a stranger in a strange land.

John Spellissey, the old man who had taken him round on the occasion of his preliminary visit of inspection, was standing on the great limestone steps in the dusk, and he welcomed Con with a mixture of cordiality and amazement in his voice.

" 'Sé do bheatha, sir," were his words to Con, " I suppose that *bastùn* Tom Owens there was gabbling away, the whole way from Keownstown here, instead of minding his nag. He's a terror to talk entirely, especially when he knows you can't contradict the lies he's telling."

" Faith, then, Mr. O'Hickie is well able to contradict," retorted Tom, stressing Spellissey's word as he used it. " You tell him he's no warrant to open drills and see the way he'll beat you."

" Yerra, don't mind that fellow," grumbled old Spellissey, taking down the last of Con's packages. " Will you come in, sir, you're heartily welcome to the place."

Rathcarrig House looked even more gloomy now, as Con entered it in the fading light, than on the sunny day he had last seen it ; and it emphasized his cheerlessness as he followed the old man across the big hall. The room they entered was in keeping with the hall and exterior, too large for comfort, with high walls and great arched ceilings, and at the far end two big, uncurtained windows, reaching almost from floor to ceiling. A good turf fire piled up with logs threw half shadows in the dusk, and gave the few trees which grew quite close to the window outside the

look of an impenetrable and unfriendly wood. Con stood a moment at the door before he realized that it contained his furniture.

" 'Tis a poor place to welcome you to," said Spellissey, kicking the fire into a brighter blaze, as if to say that he had done all that lay in his power to make it comfortable.

" We'll fix it up after a bit," said Con, looking doubtfully at the camp-bed and chair he had sent before him.

" You said in your letter," continued Spellissey, " to have a bit for you to eat. So 'tis as good for me let Delia know you're here and she'll bring it down to you. Is it tea or whiskey you'll drink, sir ? "

" Tea," said Con. " Bring down the bottle of whiskey later on, and you can tell me about the place before I go to bed."

While Spellissey was away Con took advantage of the remaining daylight to go round the house. His heart sank lower and lower as he went through a succession of gaunt, naked rooms, all more gaunt, naked, and enormous than the one he was to live in. Few had sound doors or windows, and, in most, the wainscotting was cut up by ratholes, long since abandoned when their inhabitants had ceased to find a living in so deserted a barrack. In one part only were the rooms small and the windows low, and here the ruin was more apparent, for the roof had partly given way, and broken laths and ceiling plaster lay in heaps on the damp boards of the floor. After reassuring himself that the house actually contained a bath, which now seemed to him an absurd anachronism, he returned, chilled and without appetite, to the fire in his room. There at least was some sense of life, for Spellissey's daughter was busy setting a meal on a

table they had brought in from their own cottage, while the old man was barring the shutters of the great window.

Delia, though she was the daughter of the wizened and crooked old man, was a pretty girl, uncoarsened by the hardships of a rough cottage life, and she blushed in a way that made Con's heart warm, as she turned up the lamp. But she was no cook, and he was hard put to it to swallow part of the tough and greasy chop which she gave him with evident pride; the cakes were heavy dough, the butter rancid, the tea tannin.

"Maybe 'tis too long drawn," said Spellissey, who remained in attendance throughout the meal, and from whom Con was unable to hide his inability to cope with the fare provided.

"It's a shade strong, but no matter," said Con.

"That girl is over-hasty," explained old John. "She had the tea wet at the time I went up to her and I wouldn't say but she wet it as soon as she heard the sound of the horse coming down the avenue. 'Tho' 'tis a wonder she to hear it at all," he continued, "with all the grass and leaves that's on it. Now, twenty years ago, when I was a different man from what I am to-day, this place was another thing too. The avenues was like a city park, and there was great rivalling between the old master (*go ndineadh Dia trócaire ar a anam*) and Mr. Willoughby, who was lately come back to Glenowan, Rivervale as they call it now."

"Tom Owens was telling me," said Con, and they plunged into talk which lasted till ten o'clock. By that time the greater part of the bottle of whiskey had vanished, and Con, feeling once more at least a fictitious confidence in himself, turned into his truckle-bed and fell asleep without misgiving, as the fire died down to white, powdery ashes in the hearth

CHAPTER III

While Con was having a bath and dressing in the dilapidated bath-room, Delia prepared his breakfast, a meal which proved to be a repetition of his supper, with the substitution of "American meat," a species of fat bacon, for the chop. It was served with the same shy friendliness and the same accompaniment of grease as the previous meal. Spellissey lurked in the background, less in evidence than he had been the night before.

Con spent the morning by himself, walking round his property. The house was surrounded by straggling woods, in which great oaks grew here and there, and the spaces between them were filled by misshapen birches, the only trees hardy enough to withstand the rabbits, squirrels and deer which had for generations destroyed every attempt on the part of the original varieties to reproduce themselves. After the manner of old houses Rathcarrig was built in a hole, and in spite of an open space on the east side it was impossible without going to the upper windows to see the broad river : surely a sufficiently beautiful outlook to have tempted its builders to prefer it to the dark shelter of a wooded dell.

Con took the road to the west, known as the Killeteely avenue, which ran for a mile or more to the little town, first through a grove of enormous chestnut trees, planted and protected from marauders, he reflected, by an ancestor of his own, and then through a boulder-

strewn relic of the primeval forest of Ireland out into the open ground, now a mass of withering bracken and stunted whitethorns. Once through the wood he did not stay long to contemplate the wilderness which lay between him and the lodge gate, but with a cursory glance he turned aside towards the river, where he remembered to have seen the best of the lands on his earlier visit of inspection. Here he found a prospect more to his taste. His mind was full of eagerness to lay out plans for his future farming operations, and the long stretch of river-meadowland running for a distance of nearly two miles, between the river and slopes which led up to the woods above, gave him now a rather fictitious encouragement ; for the rich, green aftergrass and here and there the big cocks of hay, telling of belated farming, gave this part of the place an appearance of fertility as striking as the apparent barrenness of the part he had just left. Here, too, there was none of the feeling of desertion, emphasized in the upland near Kilteely by the presence of a few goats and starveling cattle ; for everywhere the small farmers of the neighbourhood, who flaunted the spirit of the land laws by paying big prices for the right of cutting hay on the lands of their idle neighbours, were taking advantage of the fine weather to draw home the last of their hay before commencing their potato digging.

Con passed the time of day with one or two of them, but he was glad to escape to the solitude of the woods again, for he imagined that their greetings were sullen and their attitude towards himself unfriendly. These woods lay, an irregular belt, along the middle of the demesne, the whole of which sloped fairly sharply from the mountainy Keownstown road down to the river. A quick walk round the open ground above them brought him home to lunch.

"I suppose my bicycle came with the rest of my things," he said to Spellissey when he had finished.

"It did, sir," replied the old man. "Maybe 'tis to see Mr. Keane you're going."

"I think I will. He might give me some good advice."

"He's a good warrant to do that same," rejoined Spellissey. "He's a real decent man, though he's tough enough in business. Indeed, he's a great farmer, for he's reclaimed lands at Gortroe that were nigh as useless as this old crag of a commonage."

"Well, that's a comfort, anyway," said Con, "get me the bike and let me off."

Con was anxious to get to work as soon as possible and he was at a loss to know how to start. His short experience of farming made him confident that he could run a farm which was a going concern; but to create a farm out of land at once virgin and impoverished, and in a strange place, was a task he felt unable to tackle alone.

Gortroe was, as Owens had said, little more than a strong farmer's place, but Mr. Keane had not only his land, but his house and garden, in apple-pie order. As he was a man of standing in the county society he was able to do any work on the farm without losing caste, and Con found him in his yard helping to fill a cart at the manure pit. On seeing Con, whom he knew slightly, Keane stuck his dung fork in the heap with an air of satisfied precision, and went over to the dry ground to meet him.

"So you've bought Rathcarrig," he said when Con had reminded him of his identity. "You've a pretty tough job on hand if you intend doing anything with it."

"It's just because I want to that I've come to get your advice," returned Con.

"You'll have to work like the devil."

"I don't mind that."

"Did you ever fork dung?"

"I did, often," said Con.

"I wonder are you any good to work," said Keane, looking at Con critically. "Be jove, there are two cars coming in the gate now. Will you try can you fill one as quick as me? Bad luck to you, Mick," he shouted to one of the men, "how often am I to tell you not to go two and two. Light your pipes now awhile. This is Mr. O'Hickie from Rathcarrig over, and he's after betting me he'll fill a car in less time than myself. Give him your fork, Jim, till we see what sort he is."

Con was rather taken aback by this unusual welcome, but he took off his coat and the two of them started forking. He worked hard, till the sweat poured off him, for the day was fairly warm, but while Keane seemed to raise a barrowfull each time he lifted his fork, Con, manfully as he tore at the heap, was unable to keep up, and Jim had to help him finish his load while Keane looked on.

"You knew the tricks of the heap," said Con, when he had finished.

"Sure, all dung-heaps are alike," laughed Keane, "though perhaps they're not all as tidy as mine."

"Well, whatever way it is, I bet you are not that much stronger than me," said Con, who was feeling a little annoyed at the way the men were enjoying the episode.

"I didn't say I was," retorted Keane, "I said I knew how to use my strength better. If you had a month here maybe you'd be able for me," he added, as he saw Con becoming uncomfortable under the men's smiles.

Over a drink in the diningroom—a big, dark room

lowering with portraits of dead Keanes—they returned to the subject of the dung-heap.

“ I can see by the way you went at the job outside,” said Keane, “ that you don’t intend to play the gentleman farmer. Every gentleman’s a farmer in this county, and they’re all gentlemen farmers. They look upon me as eccentric because I work. I don’t know what they’d think of me if I didn’t occasionally have a day’s hunting or shooting, or if I wasn’t related in some way or other to most of them. According to the accepted ideas of the county it is not derogatory to act as a cattle jobber, or a groom, or a gardener ; but you mustn’t do work of any kind on a farm (though your income partly depends on it). Manual work means hands in pockets ; except perhaps when hay has to be made up quickly before a shower. A dispensation is allowed in that case. By the way, all Hickies are Catholics, so I suppose you are.”

“ I am,” said Con.

“ Then you are doubly damned,” laughed Keane. “ A Catholic who stoops to manual labour will be regarded as impossible. You mustn’t mind me calling a spade a spade.”

“ I like it,” said Con. “ I don’t a bit mind being impossible, especially as you don’t seem inclined to take that view. As you are obviously not impossible I suppose you are a Protestant. Excuse my cheek.”

“ Yes, I’m what is called a Protestant. That is I’m not a Catholic because that old ruffian with the thin nose in the corner by the window ”—he pointed to one of the portraits—“ preferred his land to his religion. As to being a Protestant, if it was not such a general term I should say I was sailing under false colours, as I don’t go to Church and I give an equal sum to the priest and the parson. Still, for the pur-

poses of the Census I am a Protestant, and it is Census religion which counts socially."

"Personally I don't care whether I'm accepted in the County or not," said Con, "but I would have thought that the O'Hickies having owned Rathcarrig long ago would have been good enough."

"Oh, yes, the country people will welcome the return of a true Dalcassian, but the county people will more likely ask what Dalcassian means! The poorer the purse the longer the memory."

"I can't say I saw much signs of welcome in the men who were drawing hay in Rathcarrig to-day," said Con.

"Ah! they didn't know who you were, probably. But of course you'll get no welcome from the faction who wanted to get Rathcarrig divided, nor from the corner-boy section either. Anyone who has anything to lose by your coming will not mind Dalcassian sentiment, though I honestly believe it is genuine enough."

"That brings us to a matter I'd like to hear what you have to say about," said Con. "Before you begin explaining to me how to run Rathcarrig, tell me do you think I'll meet much opposition?"

"You'll meet some," replied Keane, "but it will be unorganized, and not really serious, I hope. The league wanted to have Rathcarrig divided, as I dare-say you know, but the Land Commissioners refused to sanction it on the grounds that the place was uneconomic and not fit for the purpose. It was a mushroom league, so the decent members dropped out and left the roughs in possession as soon as the decision was known. The league still exists, but it does not even carry out the ordinary work of leagues, such as annoying agents like me; it exists simply to get the spoils of Rathcarrig by whatever means it can. They do everything in the dark, of course."

"I must say I don't like the prospect of having to deal single-handed with a sort of semi-secret society," said Con, thinking vaguely of the loneliness of his great dwellinghouse.

"Look here," said the older man, "if you'd like to spend a week or two here while you are getting the hang of things I'm sure my wife will be glad to put you up. I haven't a great deal of time, but I'll give you all the help I can to get started."

"You're very kind indeed," said Con with relief, "would it suit you for me to come to-morrow?"

A youngish woman with gray hair entered at this moment, and Keane introduced his wife. In two minutes it was decided that Con should return the next day, and without waiting for tea he started home, for the evenings were getting short and he did not yet know the road. How comic to speak of it as home, he reflected, as he rode off.

CHAPTER IV

Next morning two letters awaited him at breakfast. One was addressed in a round feminine writing with a backward tilt, the other in a hand which sprawled awkwardly in every direction. He opened the letter which bore the Keownstown postmark first, and read :

“ To HICKIE the GRABBER.

“ Rathcarrig will be divided amongst the people as has a rite to it. This is to warn you.

“ BLACK HAND.”

In place of date and address was a drawing evidently intended to represent a coffin. Lest the identity of its ghastly occupant should escape notice, it was labelled by way of variation, “ Hickey that grabbed Rathcarrig.” His first impulse was to laugh at its theatrical grotesqueness ; nevertheless he had to confess to himself that, in spite of his fancied security in being a Land Commission tenant, it made him feel uncomfortable.

He turned to the other letter, which was from his mother.

It was dated London, 15.10.1905.

“ My dear boy,” she wrote.

“ What possessed you to waste your little money on

buying such a hateful place as Rathcarrig I could never make out—especially as you didn't ask my advice. I confess I hardly believed it till I found myself actually putting the word on the envelope. If you don't get driven away by the savages that live round (I remember how they used to go on when I was a girl in Kerry), you will probably ruin yourself at farming, which you can't possibly understand about, and have to go to Canada without any money at your back. You see, Con, I'm rather vexed with you, especially now, because your father (I hate the way you persist in calling him Mr. Elliott) has just been saying that he could get you a splendid position in Lloyd's Bank, where he could use his influence. Just think of it, actually in this very neighbourhood, and with your own income—£300 a year is a very useful help—you would be awfully comfortable, and you could live here with us. Your father could do wonders to push you on, and you know you're a clever boy, and only want a chance to do well. Oh, Con darling, is it too late? You are throwing away such a splendid opportunity.

“Your loving Mother.”

As he read this Con felt for the first and last time in his life that a stool in a London bank had some of the properties of a bed of roses. Notwithstanding a momentary longing to embrace the proffered life of easeful drudgery he dismissed the second letter with less care than the other.

“I'd rather be a corpse in a Black Hand coffin than a living corpse,” he said later on to Keane, to whom he showed one document and communicated the contents of the other.

“That's a fact,” agreed Keane. “These devils are trying it on, to see can they frighten you. Still, they

can make themselves unpleasant in various ways. They're not the stuff to do anything really dangerous. They depend entirely on funk to get what they want."

"I suppose the post mark is no guide as to who they are?" asked Con.

"Not at all. That comes from Killeely without a doubt. I can find out in a couple of days who sent it and all about it. I must do it at once, too, or they will begin to apply the doctrine of funk to some purpose in a way that might leave us in a hole."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean this: one man can boss a hundred in these parts by what the papers used to call terrorism. It's generally believed to be extinct, but a sort of bastard form of it survives in this county and in Clare. A few blackguards who have nothing in the world but the pint of porter they're after drinking, and nothing whatever to lose, keep it up to some purpose. As there are no landlords to attack now they practise it on their own crowd. The people have no spunk that they don't lynch 'em. They say to one another that it's scandalous, and that they'll do the devil and all, and when the time comes it's 'good morrow, Jack,' as friendly as possible to maybe the worst ruffian of the lot."

"Well, I'm not one of their own crowd, why should they go for me?"

"Why, you're a tit-bit," chuckled Keane, "a choice morsel they don't have the chance of touching once in a lifetime. At present you're in a position of possession without influence, and so fair game."

"After all what can they do?" said Con.

"Oh," replied Keane, "they can fire shots at the moon which you may be fool enough to think were aimed at you. If you have any hay they can burn it

They might knock your walls, which is a favourite pastime with them, only I don't think there's a wall in Rathcarrig which isn't in ruins already. I wouldn't mind all that. But what they may do is to get at the labouring men to get them to boycott you. It may sound absurd to you, but if they have time to work in their own fashion they'll have the labouring men in the way they wouldn't go in to you for a pound a week. It would be a bad start to have to begin with emergency men."

"Old Spellissey seems a decent fellow," said Con, "but he is not much of a nucleus for a staff of farm hands. Do you have hiring fairs here or how do you get your men?"

"You just let it be known you want 'em, that's all. There's no work worth having to be got except broken time on the roads. My men have ten shillings a week and are glad to get it. Luckily this is Friday, so tomorrow we'll put a notice on the chapel gate to say that we'll be at Rathcarrig on Monday to engage so many hands. Then we'll be in a position to see how the wind blows."

On Sunday, after returning from their respective places of worship, they spent the day in walking Gortroe, valuing bullocks, discussing tillage and draining, and in doing a hundred things for which there is no time during the week, as any two men interested in farming will do all the world over. In the evening they talked steadily till one o'clock, for Keane was an enthusiast possessing experience and Con was an enthusiast seeking it. Con already felt perfectly at home in Gortroe.

After breakfast the next morning they met in the hall.

"Where's your revolver?" asked Keane, at the same time producing his own.

"Revolver!" repeated Con in amazement.

"You may want it," said Keane, significantly.

"Surely you don't think so." It was a decided shock to Con to be thus brought face to face with the realities of his position. "I don't possess such a thing."

"Well, I have an old one I'll lend you," said Keane, going upstairs again.

On their way to Rathcarrig Con reverted to the subject, which had not been mentioned since he had taken the revolver from Keane—actually the first time in his life that he had handled one.

"I can't help believing this weapon is a joke on your part," he said.

"Loaded firearms are never a joke," was Keane's reply. "At the same time I do not for a minute think there will be any occasion for them. But still I'm too old a hand to be taken unprepared at this sort of game."

"Do you think ten shillings enough to offer the men, if they are there to meet us?" asked Con.

"Plenty," said Keane, "the point is that they should be willing to work. However, we shall soon know all about it. There is Killeely below us, look."

"I'm leaving everything to you," said Con, with a comfortable feeling of subordination. They drove the rest of the way in silence, Con feeling vaguely apprehensive of whistling bullets or forbidding figures barring their passage on the avenue, Keane apparently quite unconcerned.

Con's forebodings and Keane's precautions appeared superfluous, for they found awaiting them at the hall-door an entirely undemonstrative party of men of every age, all apparently very poor. Spellissey was chatting to one, rather fatter and paler than the others. Like them this man had a half-shaved look, for it was Monday, and their hair was dark.

Spellissey stepped forward as they drove up.

"Everything that has half a hand on him is here to meet ye," he said, when he had welcomed them.

"Good," said Keane. "You're Spellissey, I suppose."

"I am, sir."

"Very well so, stop with me till you tell me something about each of these lads. Come now," he added in a louder tone to the workmen, "till I see what sort ye are."

The men exchanged looks but made no move.

"Come on, one of you," said Keane rather sharply.

They all came; nobody seemed to want to be the first.

"We want eight men," Keane addressed them almost as though he were making a speech, but with a strong accent which he only used when talking to the country people, "and there's a lot of ye in it. I'll begin by telling you that the pay is to be ten shillings a week, windfalls for firing, and a cottage for married men. The hours will be seven to seven with an hour for dinner. What do you say to that?" he added, speaking to the pale, stout man.

"They can answer for themselves," said he. "I'm a carpenter."

"Well, will it suit you?" Keane asked an older man, rather less ragged than the rest.

"I wouldn't be for giving a hasty answer," he replied. "What do ye say, boys?"

"'Tis little enough," said one.

"The hours are too long," said another.

"It had a right to be twelve shillings," said another.

"We'll work for twelve shillings a week," several of them said.

"Yerra, 'tis nonsense ye're talking," Keane scoffed.

"Don't you know well ten shillings is the value of a week's work."

"'Tis only old cripples would work for it," said a member of the crowd.

"A bad day's hire makes a bad day's work."

"True for you, Jack."

"And what about the boys who have nothing to say?" asked Keane.

"There's no fear of them," whispered Spellissey
" 'Tis the slingers do be always the biggest talkers."

Keane spoke to the bearded man again. "What's your name?"

"Pat O'Brien," was the reply.

"Are you married?"

"I am, sir."

"Do you want the job then?" he asked point blank.

"I do, sir," he said, hardly hesitating. "I've too many young childre to be doubting about it."

"Any more for a job?" cried Keane, who knew he had an easy task.

A tall, hardy-looking man about thirty in ragged clothes stepped forward. He gave his name as Tim MacDwyer. In like manner Paddy Stack, two MacMahons, two MacNamaras, and John Hanvy were engaged. A healthy, wiry, underfed set of young fellows, with the exception of O'Brien and of Hanvy, who was a man of forty or so, with a somewhat lowering expression and shifty eyes.

"Bring in your spades and we'll begin work to-morrow," announced Keane, whom all present now regarded as the "master," when the unsuccessful applicants had gone away. The carpenter, Dan Murphy, who remained, was given an order for two carts, which he undertook to build for six pounds apiece.

"I told them we'd begin to-morrow," Keane explained, "for fear they might go back on their bargain. We'll take a walk round now and lay out what they are to go at. Spellissey can keep their time and so on till you are able to come here yourself."

"They must think me an awful mug, standing by like a stuck pig," said Con, as they started off.

"Ah, no," replied Keane, "and if they do itself you'll soon be able to show them what you are. Wasn't it great work to get them so handy?"

"It was," said Con, and they plunged into agricultural topics, discussing the possibilities of the impoverished land which Con had so lightly chosen as a career

CHAPTER V

As the weather was fine, half the newly-engaged labourers were put to repair the broken-down fences and half to clean out the open drains in the low-lying meadows near the river. The latter job was no easy one, as it was quite twenty years since it had been done. Everything on the place was in a derelict condition, and these trenches had been so neglected that they had become almost filled in. When Con and Spellissey had gone over the ground at his first visit the hay was uncut, and there was little difference between trenches and meadows perceptible to the eye, though to step on them was to sink to your neck. This work fell to Tim MacDwyer, Paddy Stack and the Macks (as the MacNamaras were always called), for they were "mountainy men," and of a hardier type than the other four, who were villagers. Spellissey spent his time in pottering about, nominally repairing the yards and outhouses.

For two or three weeks Con left them to themselves. Occasionally he bicycled over to Rathcarrig and inspected their work with as much *savoir faire* as he could, though never having built a wall or dragged a trench himself he found it hard to appear knowledgeable. For the rest he worked with Keane by day and talked with him by night of the plans they had for the regeneration of Rathcarrig as a farm.

Bullocks had to be bought. The tenth of November

was Killeely fair, and at four o'clock he was awakened abruptly by the housemaid, who brought him hot water and told him the time in a way which showed that she was perfectly accustomed to such early starts. A good fire and the usual breakfast awaited them in the dining-room.

"You're eating nothing," said Keane, who was breakfasting as heartily as he would have done four or five hours later.

"I'm not the least bit hungry," said Con.

"I've been going to fairs as long as I remember," said Keane. "I can't recall the time when a fair was a novelty."

"I envy you and Bridget," Con said, as he got up to light his pipe. "I wonder will I ever reach the stage of feeling my usual self at this hour of the morning."

"Sure, you were a year farming in County Waterford, weren't you? You should be well hardened by this time."

"Oh, mudlarking on another man's farm is a different matter from having your own business to do," remarked Con. "When I was with Mr. Byrne I used to stroll into the fairs about eight o'clock and pass the time of day with a few jobbers. I tried to pick up as much information as I could, but I hadn't the satisfaction of feeling I'd done much good by going at all. In the end I used to stay at home unless the man I was with had a big lot of cattle to sell."

"He doesn't seem to have done much for the money you paid him."

"No, being a pupil is sheer waste of time. You'd learn more in a week on your own place than in a year in a place like that."

"Well, you've business to do to-day."

"But I'm relying on you to do it."

"All right. I'll be your guardian angel anyway. Come on, we must be there by six. There'll be a lot of buyers to-day, and as soon as there's light there'll be business doing."

Keane's pony was a quick goer, and they had him put up in a stable in Killeely as the first light began to reveal the irregular green around which the houses of the village were built. Bunches of cattle were already standing in seething groups, each attended by two or three men, who kept them in the places they selected with much shouting and dexterity. The four roads which converged on Killeely green were adding a constant stream of tired cattle and noisy men to the apparent confusion. Buyers were standing at each entrance, and tentative but abortive dealings were carried on in loud tones as new lots arrived in the half-light of the dawn.

Con felt completely bewildered, and he followed Keane about somewhat hopelessly, or stood beside him while he held short conversations with cattle dealers and farmers. He tried to look more at home than he felt. In spite of all his talks with Keane he was still very uncertain as to what type of cattle would be the most suitable for Rathcarrig and painfully conscious of his ignorance of values. Whatever chance he had of putting a correct price on a beast in the daylight in a field, he had none, he thought, here in the turmoil with cattle herded together in uneven lots, standing on uneven ground, and in the charge of persons of the most remarkably persuasive powers in the world.

"This'll be a cheap fair," said Keane to him.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"The big buyers are not in it," was the reply,

though how Keane could know that, Con was at a loss to understand, for it was not yet day, and men and cattle appeared to be still arriving in unabated numbers.

They were walking slowly around the green, threading their way, apparently promiscuously, between the steaming knots of cattle; but presently Con began to realize that they were working on a system, and that every lot in the fair was being methodically passed under review by Keane's practised eye. Once or twice he indicated a bunch to Con by a kind of backward look which betrayed no interest in the cattle to their owners.

"They might do," was all he said, but he did not pause a moment to examine them more closely on his first round. In this way some eight or ten lots were pointed out. Keane remembered each lot, though he had barely glanced at them in passing. One time, when Keane had quietly pointed out a likely bunch, Con paused to look at them more closely.

"What ails you?" said Keane quite sharply. "Come on."

"Sure, if they're suitable cattle why don't we price them?" said Con.

"Is it to set them in good spirits and make them think the devil and all of their cattle this early?" said Keane. "No buyers in the fair, only a few jobbers and farmers. Wait awhile now."

Con said nothing, and resolved that he would say nothing. He watched developments intelligently.

Next they went more rapidly from lot to lot of those Keane had chosen as possibilities. In each case he said, "How much for the little cattle," or, "How much are you asking for the stageens?" always somewhat disparagingly, and always ridiculing the price asked, however reasonable. For all his apparent

indifference one lot, however, appeared to take his fancy. They were soon back at them. A heated conversation in loud tones was taking place between the owner and another man.

"Damn it," said Keane, "there's another fellow in before us. This is the best lot I see in the fair. We mustn't let him see we think so, or maybe he'll make the deal on the spot." Con understood enough to know that the rigid etiquette of the fair green prevented interference, even with a higher bid, when a deal was in progress. They hovered near, apparently examining other cattle of quite different type and age. Their ears, however, were on the deal.

"I'll give you eight pounds," said the tall man, moving away confidently.

The owner remained stolid, impervious to the kindly offices of the group of entirely disinterested persons who were urging him to recall the retreating figure.

"He'll come back himself," was all he said, "Is it the way you'd have me throw away a crown?"

Keane turned round and tapped one of the bullocks with his stick; he handled him beside the tail.

"How much for this lot?" he said as if he had forgotten that he had already been told nine pounds apiece. He received the same reply again.

"How many are in it?" he asked.

"Half a score."

"Are they all bullocks?"

"They are, all to two."

"I'll give you seven-fifteen apiece for seven bullocks," said Keane, with a profound air of finality.

"I'll cull none," said the owner, disregarding the substantial reduction in the proposed price.

"How much will you say for the seven?" said Keane, equally disregarding his assertion.

"Take the eight and you can have them for eight-fifteen."

"Yerra, what nonsense, man," said Keane. "Don't you know the value of the cattle yourself?"

"I do so."

"Well, you'll give them for the seven-fifteen," said Keane.

"I will not," said he.

This normal and expected deadlock was the signal for the interference of the disinterested group. Keane had yielded the point about the number to be taken, the seller had conceded five shillings per head.

"Say you'll give him eight," said one, apparently favouring the seller.

"Give them for eight-ten," said another supporting Keane.

Neither principal made any reply, and both refused on being pressed.

"What's between ye?" broke in a voice belonging to another man, who appeared as from nowhere.

"A pound that's between them," one of the self-appointed seconds informed him.

"'Tis nothing to me," went on the newcomer, "but I tell you what you'll do: divide the pound."

"It couldn't be done," said Keane.

"You're asking too much of me, Dan," said the seller, "don't you know yourself the cattle are worth what I'm saying."

"How much is that?" asked Dan, who appeared to be well known.

"Eight-fifteen."

"Come on now. Let ye make the price eight-five and you'll none o' you be the worse of it. Will you do as I say, sir?"

"Let him say he will," said Keane.

"Let him say it," said the seller. "I will if he will," he added, as he saw Keane beginning to move away. Keane continued to move off.

"Come here, I want you," he shouted, when he had let Keane go as far as he dared, momentarily expecting him to turn back of his own accord.

"You'll give them for eight-five?" enquired Keane.

"Sure I wouldn't like to break Dan's word," he replied.

"Well, I'll give you eight apiece for them," said Keane grudgingly, and again began to move away.

"Hey, come here," called the disinterested group, who all knew by this time the preordained price. "Let the two o' ye divide the crown."

This time the principals no longer fenced, but agreed tacitly, each saying as a matter of course that he was "robbed."

"They're a nice enough lot," Keane said to Con, as he began to mark them behind the hip with a paint-stick. "I'd a right to leave you the little fellow," he remarked to the seller with a twinkle, as he marked him.

"You wouldn't get them for eight pound and a half-crown without him," he said, wonderfully cheerful for a man who had just been "robbed."

"I might," said Keane, walking off.

In this way they bought some two dozen bullocks at prices varying from £7 10s. to £8 10s., the formulæ being less complicated when the vendor was an acquaintance of Keane's, though in one case they were increased by a further bargain concerning the luck-penny to be given.

"'Tis a quiet fair," said Keane when they had finished. But the din was considerable; a hundred deals similar to the ones they had taken part in were still being made, often with much shouting, all with

unruffled good-humour. Nothing is so rare as bad blood in a cattle fair, though the evening which follows it is generally responsible for the majority of the next petty sessions cases.

At ten o'clock they went to the bank, and, pushing his way through a struggling mass of people to the teller's box, Con presented his cheque for £190, the signing of which was the first active part he had taken in the day's proceedings. He had worked out with Keane how he wanted it, the values of the notes required, and as he was already known to the manager no hitch occurred in the bank. Outside the erstwhile owners of the cattle they had bought were standing with others in similar circumstances. Con disbursed the money, while Keane kept a check on the figures and made sure that the recipients gave at least one shilling per beast for luck. They all seemed surprised at being paid by Con instead of Keane. Con tried his best to play the part of Keane's clerk, and thanked his stars that none of them seemed to recognize him as the newcomer in Rathcarrig.

As Rathcarrig was now partially stocked it became necessary to secure a cattleman for the place. Dick Keane fortunately knew of a man beyond Gortroe who possessed the manifold qualities required of a herd. Thady Comyn, he said, was a thoroughly reliable fellow, a good milker, a bit of a cow doctor, and seldom if ever drank too much. He was out of work, and it was too good a chance to lose. So, before leaving the fair they made inquiries where he was to be found, well knowing that he would not miss the fair of Killeely, even though he had no business to transact in it. They discovered him acting in the capacity of disinterested intermediary in one of the deals which were still going on. He proved quite ready to go to work with Con.

It was Thady Comyn who was the innocent cause of bringing Con's stay at Gortroe to an end. His visit had already exceeded its intended duration when one day a letter came to Keane from Con's new herd. It stated that one of the bullocks was ailing, and requested permission to buy certain medicines. This letter annoyed Con exceedingly. Its contents were unexceptional, but it was addressed to Dick Keane, not to him, and this fact made him feel that he occupied an ignominious position in regard to Rathcarrig. He instantly resolved to answer the letter in person. Never again would he let it be said that he was not master in his own place.

Thady's blue eyes opened wide as he listened to Con's vigorous language in the shed where he had put the sick bullock. But he accepted the situation without comment, and took Con at his own valuation by asking him questions about the treatment of the patient, as to an equal in the art. Con discussed the matter not altogether without wisdom, and Thady shewed by his slightly altered manner that he considered that he had made a mistake in his previous estimate of Con's intelligence. As to Con, he conceived for the tall, big-limbed countryman a liking which in due course ripened into something like friendship.

Thus Con was brought definitely to take up his abode in the old, dilapidated house. He settled down as well as he could, but it was not long before he found Delia Spellissey's well-meant culinary efforts too much for him. One particularly unappetizing meal drove him to find a housekeeper ; and in due course Martha Lally, a wonderful old dame of powerful arm and forbidding countenance, was installed in the long-deserted kitchen. Her faculty as a comedian when she was in a cheery mood would have won her a high

place on the music-hall stage, and her powers of sarcasm and invective were tested and proved a few nights after she arrived when she effectively disposed of the garrulous Jack Hanvy, who, slightly drunk, made his way into her kitchen—to “vit” her, as she said—inventing some unnecessary errand. Her treatment of him was masterly, and excited Con’s admiration, who listened from his window above to their dialogue at the door. It also gave him an insight into the character of Jack Hanvy which coincided with the first impression he had received from his pig-like eyes.

“I could tell you a thing or two about them people,” Jack was saying, as he retreated through the door.

“Get away out o’ that,” shouted Lally, “you miserable, slinging gluggera, trying to poison me mind agin decent people. Go back to your shebeen and see would you pick up some more porter leavings.”

“The tinker, to be coming in to me like that,” she added to herself, shaking her fist after the departing figure.

“I’d want to mind how I take Lally,” thought Con, chuckling over the encounter he had listened to. “Anyway, she can cook, whatever sort of a tongue she has.”

CHAPTER VI

In a sense Con's life at Rathcarrig was without incident : that is, it was marked by no exciting and unexpected events, nor was it livened by much social intercourse with the people of his own standing who lived in the neighbourhood. To say that it was without incident, however, is to produce an inaccurate impression. He knew nothing of dulness and boredom, or of the weary toiler's longing for rest and change. The weeks slipped by, and he would have been almost oblivious of the passage of time were it not for the reminders, unimportant but insistent, which he received in his daily work that seed time was again not far distant : the lengthening days after Christmas when the evening bell could be rung at five o'clock, and so through the quarters back to its normal hour of six o'clock ; the hay in the barn gradually diminishing in quantity, calling for speculation upon its chances of lasting out the winter ; conversations with Pat O'Brien about implements soon to be required for spring tillage ; primroses under sheltered banks and snowdrops at the foot of the great beech trees ; lambs in the neighbours' fields ; Lent. But though the winter's work which he did from day to day held little variety, Con knew no dull moment. There was an element of drudgery about the labour perhaps : often he would set himself to fill stones into a cart for the length of the day, to grub furze-bushes,

to dig the weed-grown garden, or through long hours of ceaseless winter rain to saw logs for the fire. But when his body was confined to one spot and engaged in somewhat monotonous work his imagination was set free. As he worked, the field became clear of stones and bushes ; it was ploughed, sown, reaped ; plans for its future uses filled his mind. The more tedious the work itself and the less attention it required the wider the range for his ideas. Sometimes, as when sawing logs of timber on a wet day, he would forget the mechanical movement of his arms altogether and be recalled to himself by a sudden jerk of the saw, due to his inattention. But this seldom happened. Con was too anxious to take a man's share in any work that was going forward to lay himself open to the charge of idling. More often he made his companion sweat, and swear afterwards to his comrades at dinnertime : " the master's mad for work." He enjoyed this element of rivalry, of pitting strength against strength which most work on a farm allows ; and he enjoyed it the more because, not having been born to the life, he started under a certain handicap, and so was the keener to excel. To use the muscles and sinews of the body to the best advantage, above all on productive work, is a joy in itself ; and Con found his reward, despite irregular meals and constant wettings, in the best of health, and in a relish for his food which he had never known even in his schooldays.

Though he was not consciously aware of these things, Con was subconsciously affected by them. He had found a life after his own heart among surroundings wherein nature is not made the slave of man, but man becomes part of nature. His boyish impetuosity in choosing Rathcarrig as a career cost him no regrets, and he already felt at home in the place which had once been the home of his fathers.

A few people had called on him ; Mrs. Willoughby whose place Tom Owens had pointed out to him on their way from Keownstown station ; the two priests, Fathers Mulryan and Hehir ; and Canon McNabb, the North of Ireland clergyman who ministered to the few scattered Protestants in the combined parishes of Keownstown and Killeely.

There exists in every small town in Ireland also another stratum of society, ignored by the gentry and despised by the peasantry, but in its own eyes a social circle of considerable importance. In Killeely this consisted of Dr. Tomilty, the dispensary doctor, Ambrose Hctor, an auctioneer and chairman of the District Council, and Henry Hctor, the chief shop-keeper and publican. The petty sessions clerk and one or two of the bank officials made up the regular members, their numbers being reinforced from time to time by the temporary sojourn of some excise official or agricultural inspector.

If Con was regarded somewhat coldly by his own class in the county, who were inclined, as Keane, his only friend, had warned him to expect, to look upon him as a not very desirable interloper, he was equally outside the pale of the "*élite*" in Killeely. Ambrose Hctor and his friends did not quite know in what category to place him, and so, being aware of certain formal visits paid by Mrs. Willoughby and others to Rathcarrig, they left Con alone. Con was altogether too deeply absorbed in the interest of his new work to give a thought to either set of his new neighbours. He did not aspire to the friendship of any of them, nor did he intend to repel it, if offered, before he had formed his own opinion. One day, however, he cut his hand badly and had to go to the dispensary to get it stitched. So he made the acquaintance of Dr. Tomilty.

Dr. Tomilty is easy to describe. He was the perfect type of a boss politician, and indeed he would have been more at home on the platform or in the precincts of Westminster than in an operating theatre. The fat, pale face, brown moustache, heavy watch-chain rising and falling on its convex resting-place; the hat a shade too small, the coat a shade too long, the trousers a shade too tight, all proclaimed him for what he was: a party politician first and a physician afterwards. The doctor was not at the dispensary when Con went to Killeely. He was directed to his lodgings above at Henry Hector's shop.

Having lived in his uncle's house in Dublin, he somehow expected to find a brass plate with "Dr. Tomilty" neatly engraved thereon, perhaps with his consulting hours also detailed; even a day and night bell, brightly polished. But as there was no brass plate in evidence, and as Henry Hector's house appeared at first sight to have no door except that leading into the shop itself, Con entered Mr. Hector's emporium. Several young men were engaged behind the counter, their function being, as far as Con could see, rather to bargain with their customers about prices than to supply their needs.

Con interrupted an argument relating to the price and quality of a pair of boots which an old woman, who knew him but whom he did not know, was handling with manifest contempt.

"Does Dr. Tomilty hang out here?" he asked, unconsciously using a phraseology suited to the atmosphere of the place. A voice came over the glass partition which divided the shop from the bar: "He does so, old sport, whoever you are. If you want him you just step inside."

So in Con stepped, impelled more by the blood

which was still running from the wound in his hand than by any confidence which this greeting had aroused in him. He tried to look natural, though he never felt so uncomfortable and self-conscious as when he was in a bar.

"Dr. Tomilty, I gather," he said.

"There you have the advantage of me," rejoined the doctor magniloquently. "Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?" He winked at his companions, no other than Ambrose Hocter and his brother, as he spoke.

"My name's O'Hickie, and my needs are two stitches in my hand," said Con shortly, holding out his bloodstained bandage.

"Very pleased to meet you, Mr. O'Hickie," said Dr. Tomilty, changing his tone somewhat, so that he now spoke with a mixture of familiarity and deference. "I will attend to you at once. These gentlemen are Messrs. Ambrose and Henry Hocter, at whose expense I am having a drink," he added facetiously. "You will join us in a half-one, I hope, Mr. O'Hickie."

"'Twould be better stop the blood first, I fancy," said Con, "unless," he went on icily, "your cure is to let blood run out of one part of one and to supply the deficiency by pouring in whiskey at another part."

"'Tis no bad cure, then," laughed the dispensary doctor, and Con began to perceive that he was not quite sober.

"I'm afraid I must be going," he began, retreating towards the door.

Dr. Tomilty changed his manner at once.

"This way, please, Mr. O'Hickie," he said briskly, and before Con could escape he found himself being led up a narrow stairway to the doctor's room: "torture chamber more like," he reflected ruefully.

Dr. Tomilty's ministrations, however, did not prove as painful or as maladroit as he had feared, and in a few minutes he was handing him a half-sovereign as fee.

"Now, sir," said the doctor, as they descended the stairs, "the least you can do is to take a drink out of your own half-bird." Before Con could say a word he was once more in the private bar with a "half-one" before him.

However much out of his element Con felt in the unusual company in which he found himself, he was not disposed to adopt a deliberately unfriendly attitude towards his new acquaintances. In fact, his feelings were rather apathetic than unfriendly. Con was not possessed of a great deal of moral courage; but if he had been, there was no real reason why he should not stay and have a drink. At college he had often been the leader in a riotous carouse, but he had never become one even of the fringe of the bar-lounging fraternity. His disinclination to remain, however, was not strong enough to make him refuse the doctor's proffered hospitality.

The doctor and the two Hectors were soon joined in their haunt by Willie Andrews, the bank accountant, a not very young man, who was already shewing signs of baldness, had a somewhat glassy eye, and wore an ostentatious signet ring.

"Good marra, byes," he cried in an exaggerated brogue, by way of greeting.

Con nerved himself to refuse further drinks and succeeded in this, but Ambrose Hector, from whose pompous and obese presence it seemed impossible to escape, prevailed on him to stay a little longer. He was one of those consequential, heavy bores who can unbend betimes to tell an interminable story depending upon lubricity rather than upon wit for its point.

Con was enduring one of these, and wondering could he escape at the end of it: no easy matter when Ambrose had found a new listener, for his stories flowed one out of another, without interval. His familiar, Willie Andrews, however, evidently regarded him with contempt as a raconteur, for, just as the climax of the tale was about to be reached, Con was relieved from the danger of laughing at the wrong moment by Willie's careless interruption.

"I say, Ambie, old man, you're going to the Keownstown dance, of course."

"I suppose I will," he replied, "'tis a long time since I had any amusement, but I'm a trifle heavy, d'you know, for dancing."

"Nonsense, Ambie, you're a fairy; and anyway J. J. will be plentiful as usual. The doctor has his eye on Peggy Folane: he's sure to be going. Doing anything to-night, Mr. O'Hickie?"

How it happened Con could never remember, but the fact remains that when he left Henry Hoctor's bar he had engaged himself to go to Keownstown that night with the four "prime boys" he had just met.

As he walked home, the recollection of his capitulation, almost without a show of resistance, caused him to curse himself as a weak-minded fool, for he had no taste for such entertainments, particularly in such company. He may be excused, if plea be needed, on the ground that he was not twenty-three years of age, and that Ambrose Hoctor and Willie Andrews together made a very persuasive combination.

Having said he would go, he went; and he was not without a sense of curiosity as he climbed on to Henry Hoctor's car for the long drive. Henry Hoctor belonged to a class which prospered even when other people engaged in more productive, but less lucrative,

occupations such as agriculture were languishing ; and his horseflesh was of the best. For all her heavy load his mare did the journey in very little more than an hour and a quarter.

When they arrived, the proceedings were well under weigh : a " full-set " was in progress, and Con watched the dancers going through the evolutions of that particular form of square dance, now threading their way singly in the complicated maze of figures, now advancing and retiring in couples, now whisking around all together. The music was supplied by two ancient fiddlers, who were to work away untiringly, and apparently without a murmur, throughout the long hours of the night, only stopping to swallow more and still more porter or whiskey from the tumblers always kept filled to their hands: remarkable old men, one tapping the ground unceasingly with his heavy boot in time with his music, the other, as he took up the tune, grinding his toothless gums in unison with the dancers' feet. At length the set came to an end and the partners separated, all the girls trooping to seats at one side of the room, the men strolling to the other or crowding to the door to look for drinks outside. Set after set was thus gone through, varied occasionally by a polka or a waltz, the latter dance, grievous trouble to the musicians, being performed by only a few of the *élite*, such as Con's companions from Kiltelly. A couple of Irish dances were included, partly because only by this means could the fiddlers be kept in good humour, and also to give an opportunity for the few dancers who had the steps to shew them off.

" There should be more of them step dances and less of this shoneen stuff," Con heard a man say to his companion, as a couple who had been dancing a jig

struck the floor a final stroke of their feet and bowed to the spectators. It was almost the only evidence he perceived that night that the spirit of Ambrose Hocter and Willie Andrews did not pervade the entire assembly.

For some time Con took no part. He found a seat in a corner of the room, and realized with a sense of relief that he was likely to remain unmolested by his acquaintances and almost unnoticed by strangers. Indeed, he soon discovered that he was half glad he had come. A young man of twenty-three, and one moreover who for six months has been entirely bereft of female society, must needs enjoy looking at a lot of girls dancing; and Con felt no disposition to deny to himself that he thoroughly enjoyed watching the young ladies of Keownstown, although he was not quite sure that he would relish for very long the passive role he was playing. Nevertheless, in reply to a casual inquiry he admitted that he knew nothing of the intricate movement of the "sets," and regretted that he had no "steps." He was content, for the time being at least, to look on.

There was little beauty in the room, which was itself garish, and its careless attempts at decoration crude and inartistic: here a pretty face, perhaps, spoilt by thick ankles and a dumpy figure; there beautiful hair crowning a head of no distinction; or a comely figure marred by a plain face. But everywhere there was life; everywhere eyes alight with pleasure and excitement and cheeks flushed with the glow of youth. Occasionally a pretty girl, too, he thought as time went on.

"God, she's nice," he said to himself involuntarily, as he caught sight of a girl whom he had not seen before. She had in fact arrived late. The object of

his gaze was now occupied in dancing a "set," and he noticed with admiration her half parted lips as she crossed the floor, her quick smile when some slight mistake in the dance was made by her partner, and the delicate curves of her figure, suggested rather than exhibited by the soft dress she was wearing.

Once he had seen her he was less content to remain seated in obscurity. But he was lucky. It was not necessary for him to employ any strategy to secure an introduction to her. The petty spites and petty amusements of the Kildeely party came to his assistance.

Con had told Willie Andrews during their drive from Kildeely that he could waltz. Now, Willie Andrews was not the kind of man to lose an opportunity of taking one of his associates down a peg. He knew well that the doctor was gleefully anticipating the pleasure of dancing a waltz with Peggy Folane, "the girl he had his eye on," while the less gifted looked on admiringly. It was therefore with a quite obviously malicious delight that the bank man now brought Con over to where Peggy was sitting, and caused him to carry her off under the very nose of the ogling doctor.

He thought he heard her mutter, "thank God," as they stepped out to join the few other couples who could waltz.

Con said little, but he studied his partner as they circled round the room, under conditions by no means favourable to the fashionable dance. Unconsciously, as he looked at her he held her tighter, and, noticing this she glanced up at him and then let her eyes drop demurely. He reflected that in this matter at least the doctor could not be accused of bad taste, for Peggy Folane was undeniably pretty—just such a girl as our

countryside can produce so happily only to turn them, by the very harshness of the life it entails, all too soon into hard-faced spinsters or worn and untidy matrons. Con noticed her refined hands, he remembered her slim ankles and her neat shoes ; her pretty face intrigued him with its slightly *retroussé* nose, black eyebrows and lashes covering grey eyes, which looked in the lamplight almost as black.

"The floor is hardly fit for so good a dancer as you," said Con, beginning at last to enjoy himself thoroughly. "I'm a stranger here ; do you know any place where we could sit it out."

"I do, I think," she replied, "there's little call for the couple of places that's in it, so early as this."

They left the room, and she led him along a passage to a deserted stairway. A single candle guttered in the sconce on the wall. They were in the Town Hall, he learnt.

Since he had come to Rathcarrig Con had hardly spoken to a girl except Delia Spellissey. In his Trinity days he had been in love with someone all the time, though the object of his affections was seldom the same for many months together. He already perceived again the ominous feeling within him which he knew only too well. Nevertheless he felt shy and awkward.

Con's impulse was to break the ice by drastic means : straightway to kiss Peggy and let talk come naturally afterwards, as wine flows when the cork is drawn.

"I wonder would I be a swine if I did : I don't think so," he thought. Yet even as he told himself that she was much nicer than any girl he had ever kissed in the past, something made him hesitate, for he felt instinctively that she was not of the sort with whom such liberties can be taken.

They found a seat at the head of the stairs and

for a minute or two they sat in silence. They were quite alone. The flickering candle cast shifting shadows, as it were into a pit below them, and ever and anon snatches of sound, weirdly unmusical as they reverberated through the bare passages, floated up the staircase and reminded them of the crowded dance room. Though there was no fire anywhere near them, the place was comparatively free from draughts, and they had little thought at the time of colds and chills.

It was Con who spoke first, unconventionally enough :

"Do you know I was just going to kiss you ; but I stopped, because I feel you're too nice to be treated so lightly."

"Plenty of people want to kiss me, I find," she said, laughing, and quite unconcerned. "A few tried it," she added, with a note of grimness in her voice.

"Ah !" said Con, thanking his stars for his prudence.

"When I saw you," she continued, "I thought you were not that sort."

"I really don't know what sort I am," he said. "It depends on the girl, I think. Now, I've not spoken to a girl for months, would you believe it, and so there's an excuse for me being hasty. Besides, you know, you're pretty enough to turn anyone's head on the spot." He edged quite close to her as he spoke. She did not move away : perhaps because she was already seated against the wall.

"'Tis easy say that," she said.

"'Tis easy speak the truth sometimes. Oh, excuse me, you've a hairpin falling out," he added suddenly, to give himself an excuse for touching her. He replaced the imaginary pin—but he was astonished to find himself unable to carry the battle any farther into the enemy's country

"I'm thinking you're much like the rest, after all," said Peggy, regarding him with an amused expression.

"Why?" asked Con.

"If you weren't you'd not be friends of Mr. Andrews and his crowd."

"I only met them to-day," Con remonstrated. "What don't you like about them? I can be pretty certain I'll never take to them enough to give you away, whatever you say. Only for having to get a couple of stitches in my hand—you see this bandage—I'd not have known the doctor or any of them."

"That's the fellow I dislike the most of them," she said, "with his mouthy way of saying 'Miss Folane,' and even trying to maul me: you wouldn't know what he'd try to do. They're a shoneen lot, and they're what has Ireland in the state it is to-day."

As she spoke her voice lost that slight trace of something Con did not quite like. There had been in it a tone, perceptible but not pronounced, which Con, for all his undisguised admiration of her physical charm, had felt as a barrier between them: an incitement perhaps to fictitious intimacy, but a bar to real understanding. For a moment, as she finished speaking, he heard a new note—not merely a note of bitter contempt, but underlying it the ring of deep conviction. It was but a flash; something revealed to Con for a second and forgotten again by him a moment after.

"Of course," she went on in the same half-bantering, familiar way as before, "I've heard of you going to Rathcarrig, but no one here knows anything about you. Some say you're English, and more say you're not. The fact is, there's a great deal of talk about you, or there was when you came first, but nothing known."

"'Twould be a queer Englishman with the name of O'Hickie," said Con.

"That's a fact," she assented. "Anyway, I wasn't saying that you were English. I could see you're not. But 'tis worse to be West British like the crowd you came here with."

Con agreed, and she continued: "To my thinking an Irishman is only half an Irishman or less if he can't speak his own language, and doesn't give a pin whether the clothes he wears are of Irish material or not. I'm an Irish Irelander, you see. Now, what are you?"

"Oh, I don't know," Con said, "I suppose I'm a Home Ruler, but I certainly never thought much about it. I hadn't a vote at the election the other day even if there'd been one here, and I'm more interested in farming and getting Rathcarrig into shape."

"Well, I'll test you," she said. "*An maith leat an Leader*?"

Con gaped.

"There now, you know no Irish," she cried.

"If you said *tabhair dhom póg* I'd understand you."

"Maybe you would, but I wouldn't throw that much Irish to a *Béarlóir*. Now I'll try your clothes. Tell me where was your suit made?"

"A tailor in Westmoreland Street made it," he replied, feeling he would score a point there.

"Of course you had had it made in Dublin, when you were living there," she said, "there's no credit in that. What about the stuff? Is it Irish manufacture?"

"I don't know, for I didn't ask."

"'Tis sure to be foreign then: these high-class shops never give you Irish manufacture if they can avoid it. Have you anything really Irish on you, to your certain knowledge?"

"My collar's Irish, I believe," Con said.

"Well, everyone's collar is Irish, because linen's not made in England; but still I'll grant you the collar. You've saved yourself."

Con questioned her about the Gaelic League, and found that there was a struggling branch in Keownstown, kept together, he guessed, by a few enthusiasts like Peggy Folane. He learnt a good deal about the troubles of a country *craobh*, the lack of more than temporary enthusiasm, the great difficulties of the language itself, and the patronizing contempt of the "*élite*."

"I'm a teacher in the National School here," she explained, "and the way I got what Irish I have was by going to Ballingeary, to the summer college there."

"I wish you'd teach me," he exclaimed with sudden keenness.

She laughed, and they did not consider the proposition in its practical aspect.

For some time they talked on about the language and the chances of its restoration to a vigorous life, till Con, despite his sudden desire to learn it, began to wish that the conversation was of a more personal nature. The charm and fascination of the girl beside him had put a spell upon him, more potent than any enthusiasm he could feel for the cause she championed so ardently.

"Let's begin our first lesson now," he said suddenly. "Let me see, *cailín* is a girl," he said to himself, and then to her: "Tell what is "*I am*," "*you are*." Now what is *big, little, ugly, pretty*?" The words were his, and he said in triumph: "*Tá tú cailín deas*."

Her burst of laughter disconcerted him, ignorant of its cause.

"That doesn't happen to mean anything in Irish, smart and all as you are," she remarked.

"Well, you know what I meant, anyway," he said ruefully.

"You made a mess of it all the same," she replied.

"All right," said Con, "I bet you I'll make no mistake now."

"Go on then," said Peggy.

"*Tabhair dhom póg*," he rapped out, ignoring the sentence he was supposed to be saying.

"I would if you'd been able to say 'please,'" she laughed, tantalizing him.

A flash of memory came to him. Spellissey, a native speaker from Kerry, had taught Con a few greetings. Con had regarded it as a mere joke, but he had once asked him for the Irish for "please."

Without hesitation the phrase came to him now.

"*Má 'sé do thoil é*," he whispered triumphantly, and she gave in.

Con was so happy and light-hearted and so much averse from the society of Ambrose Hector, Dr. Tomilty and Willie Andrews that he set out at four o'clock in the morning to walk the twelve miles to Rathcarrig. He arrived in the yard just at bell-time, wet through but whistling. Spellissey, the innocent instrument of his happy mood, regarded him with amazement.

CHAPTER VII

Con was surprised to receive one morning an invitation from the Willoughbys to dine at Rivervale the following week. Up to this there had been no semblance of cordiality in their intercourse. It had, indeed, consisted of no more than a single call from Mrs. Willoughby, for Con's return visit had been abortive. The recollection of Mrs. Willoughby's call gave him no pleasure. Though he cared little for the ordinary conventions of society, he could not but feel dissatisfied with the part he had played as host on that occasion.

Mrs. Willoughby had chanced to come at the very moment of Con's arrival in the yard, malodorous dung fresh from the manure pit on his boots and legs. He had returned to meet Bill Cummins, the jobber, about some bullocks, and had walked unawares into the cockaded coachman. So that no plea of absence from home was possible, even if the incomprehensible Lally had not, with the mock dignity of semi-intoxication, already ushered Mrs. Willoughby into the untidy living-room. He remembered his unshaven chin with an uncomfortable sensation; and to make matters worse Lally had a habit of letting the fire out during the day, however cold the weather. Mrs. Willoughby, shivering in her chilly and uncongenial surroundings, had proved to be very formal and very English (why do our landed classes not only export their children

to England but also import their wives therefrom ?), and the long interval during which Lally had first to light a fire and then procure tea had been filled in with a series of intermittent and perfunctory questions and answers : they had resembled people in quest of a house in a town they knew but slightly, constantly setting off on some fresh path and ever returning without success to try another. The memory of this flashed through his mind when he saw the name at the bottom of the letter of invitation, but his half-spoken comment was :

“Heavens, have I a dress suit ?”

Remembering that he had, he accepted forthwith. He was no lover of social functions, but he was not averse from an occasional break in his lonely routine at Rathcarrig, and he was anxious to make the acquaintance of Mr. Willoughby, whom he had not met.

In due course he arrived at the hall-door of Riverdale, punctual to the moment and presentable in appearance. He was shown in to the drawingroom by an old butler, a very pattern of formality, who seemed to him to tell of a household of un-Irish precision. Mrs. Willoughby came forward to meet him.

“I can shake hands this time,” he said, somewhat gauchely.

“I beg your pardon ?” was Mrs. Willoughby’s uncomprehending reply.

“I was thinking of my dirty hands and unpresentable condition the day you called,” he explained half-inaudibly, as he found himself being introduced to his neighbour, Miss Mary Lalor, of Kilteely House. The two Willoughby girls and Dick Keane made up the party. No doubt Keane’s account had corrected Mrs. Willoughby’s probable impression of him as an impossible person.

Mr. Willoughby's arrival was not long delayed, and they proceeded to the dining-room, Con, to his delight, taking in Miss Lalor.

His companion appeared to be about twenty-five years of age. She was tall for a girl, perhaps not more than two inches or so less in height than Con ; she gave the impression at first glance of having a boyish, almost an angular, figure, but her evening dress revealed a neck and arms which belied the boy in her, and the amethyst pendant at the open V of her dress lay upon a soft, white skin under which there was no trace of bony angularity. Her dress was of a dark, straw colour, darker than oaten straw, lighter than moist bracken under a winter sun : it must have been carefully chosen, for it exactly matched her hair, which some would have called chestnut, some copper, some golden, but none would describe aright in a single word. Con could not make up his mind all at once whether she was pretty or not ; he was conscious of blue eyes set wide apart, of a mouth whose expression shewed too much austerity for his liking, of a nose which seemed to contradict the mouth.

He adopted his stock remark to get over the difficulty of conversation with a total stranger under the not very favourable conditions of passing from one room to the other.

" I wonder," he said, " that a past generation which was famous for its courtly manners did not go in more for wider doors between the rooms of expectation and fulfilment."

" I believe you've said that before, quite often in fact," laughed Miss Lalor, and with her laugh the hard lines of her mouth disappeared.

" If I have itself, it fills in a gap," he said, and they took their seats.

The talk being of county people with whose names and doings Con was not very familiar, he held his peace, and divided his attention between his food and contemplation of the wonderful stiffness of Mr. Willoughby.

He almost said to his neighbour, "You'd imagine they'd starched the old gentleman along with his shirt," but, though he felt confident she would appreciate the remark and take it without resentment, he could hardly be sure of her yet, and the table was small, forbidding him to take any risks.

The conversation turned on some trouble which a county landlord was experiencing with his labourers. Mr. Willoughby was stern in his condemnation.

"The people of this country are never satisfied," he said, "no sooner have they got one thing than they want another. First it was the abolition of the Church; then the land; now that they have frightened a weak Government into yielding up our rights, they proceed to look for more wages. They do not thank us for providing them with employment. The most ungrateful people on earth, I venture to believe."

"I know your views are held by all our class," said Keane. "but I cannot help thinking that the wages we pay are miserably small."

"Whatever we are paying, which of us is not losing money on his farming?" was the rejoinder.

"I grant that," Keane admitted, "but they have a hard time."

Con found his voice for a question: "What is the current rate of wages here?" he enquired.

"Ten shillings a week and perquisites—worth another three perhaps," he was told.

"Ah," he said. He was already paying more.

He relapsed into silence again, but Miss Lalor seemed indisposed to leave the question where it was, for she said to Mr. Willoughby :

"Why are you so insistent on the ingratitude of the people : I like them, and find it hard to believe. My own experience is that they are absurdly grateful for any little thing one does for them."

Their host detailed certain cases of which he had personal experience.

"You cannot disbelieve facts, Mary," said his wife.

"Father knows what he is talking about," the elder Miss Willoughby explained to Con in an undertone. "Such things are painful and may perhaps astonish you as a newcomer. If you heard these things from an absentee in Dublin you might be incredulous, but Father has always been a resident landlord, and so is in a position to speak with authority."

Mary was not satisfied. She seemed stung by the old man's manner, for she said with unexpected warmth :

"I love the people. It is *they* are the people of Ireland, and not the landlord class."

"Your father was a landlord," Mr. Willoughby reminded her.

"I know," she replied. "I was going to add : the class we all belong to."

"You are young," said Mr. Willoughby sententially, "youth—some would call it the generosity of the aristocratic mind—evinces a magnanimity towards inferiors which, if carried too far, leads to dangerous paths of betrayal ; disloyalty to family and friends."

"Then do you think perpetual class war is inevitable in Ireland ?" Mary Lalor asked him.

"Until the masses learn sense I do. Perhaps that means perpetuity. Certainly nothing good can come

of any of us essaying to lead the popular side. We cannot contemplate many Smith O'Briens : not even a noble death to cover his shame, but a cabbage garden fiasco followed by a miserable slinking into obscurity."

"Smith O'Brien is one of my heroes," said Mary.

"My dear girl, I had no idea you had such pronounced Fenian sympathies. Really, they are out of place in this room and out of date in the twentieth century. How do you feel on this matter, O'Hickie?" he continued, turning to Con.

Con had been listening with one ear to Miss Willoughby's tepid *rechauffé* of her father's opinions and with the other to the remarks of that stalwart upholder of the *ancien régime*. He was now brought into the more general conversation by Mr. Willoughby's question.

"I cannot say I take much interest in politics," said Con. "I am too busy trying to make my old wilderness into a farm. My father, of course, was an enthusiast for everything Irish, and instilled into me some ideas you might not approve of. However, as I say, I have no prejudices in the matter. As far as I have any views I am a Home Ruler, or at least a Devolutionist."

"Oh," his host remarked, "like Miss Lalor here, you are young, but you are more likely to form sensible opinions than she; for you will soon be face to face with hard facts. She, on the other hand, lives with her mother, and so has theories untrammelled by any serious responsibilities."

"I wish I were a man," retorted Mary, "with the responsibilities which would make it possible for me to put my theories, as you call them, into practice."

She was reproved thus: "Come, come," said the old landlord, "you are talking wildly. Tell me, now,

for I am not too old to learn wisdom from the mouths of babes and sucklings, how do I, and probably Mr. O'Hickie, misuse our opportunities? How ought landlords to behave to satisfy you? You cannot deny that we give employment. We have most of us sold to our tenants, and, even if we have not, we have no scope for rackrenting and injustice of that kind. There have been bad landlords in the past, of course; but they were mostly of the mushroom type; lawyers who came into property after the famine had ruined many of the old families, and such like. But there has been gross misrepresentation, even of such cases as did occur. Anyhow, it is all past: what do we do wrong now?"

"Well," she replied, after a moment's hesitation, "I would say that the landlord class in Ireland fails because it has never become absorbed in the Irish State. It has always aped the English upper classes, and taken pride in the name of 'garrison.' You, perhaps I should say we, are bad citizens because we are citizens of no land. We acknowledge no allegiance to an Irish nation. Its very existence is denied. We are not citizens of Great Britain, for Great Britain and Ireland are separate kingdoms, as anyone who looks at a Bank of England note can see for himself. To be a citizen of the British Empire means very little; nothing to me; it is too big to kindle patriotism. So I say we are mere individuals, not citizens—people call us West Britons derisively."

"I quite disagree with what you say about British patriotism, and I see no subject for derision in the term 'West Briton,'" said Mr. Willoughby, "but you are speaking in generalities. I asked you to tell me what, in your opinion, does our class do now, which is definitely and positively unsatisfactory according to your lights"

"It's all so negative," Mary responded. "It is not easy to defend my position against what I dare to call your materialistic view, because mine is based on abstract principles. It reminds me of the difficulty I was in to answer my cousin Jim once. He said he had never read any poetry, and he asked me to make a start for him. So I began to read him Keats's 'Ode to Autumn.' When I came to the line, 'to swell the gourd and plump the hazel shell,' he said suddenly: 'why not call it a bally nut'—even more vigorous I think he was, if I remember. How could I answer, short of a homily on abstract principles? I shut the book and laughed. With you I feel I must laugh now and not shut the book, but buy books to enlighten you." Mary Lalor spoke laughingly, but a note of antagonism sounded in her voice. "If I had the skill I would write one myself."

"Though I've known you since you were a baby, Mary," Mr. Willoughby remarked in his stiff way, "I cannot express an opinion on your capacity to write a book, particularly a convincing book. But at least it is not too much to ask you for a *precis* of what its contents would be. Surely you can give me an idea of the line you would take to upset my old-fashioned notions."

Mary hesitated as she cast about in her mind for a suitable reply. Though she knew her own mind and could express herself well enough, it was evident that she was not well practised in argument. Besides, as she had said herself, she had the more difficult case to plead.

At this point Keane thought fit to interpose an irrelevant remark about some cattle he and Con had bought together, and the topic, which was just beginning to be interesting, was dropped.

When the ladies had left the table Mr. Willoughby returned to the subject. "Mary Lalor," he said, "is a very remarkable girl; that is, she has considerable ability. I like to see young people taking their own line, but I confess I like to see them original rather than derivative. Now, with her I feel that she is full of the things she hears expressed by the unwashed gods of literary circles in Dublin. She cannot even make out a decent case for the view she essays to champion. Yet she has courage, and she will grow out of her absurdities. Citizens, indeed," he continued, thinking of her attack. "Why, our class alone of all the people in this distracted country has any conception of the meaning of the word citizenship. It is a queer kind of citizenship which consists in boycotting, moonlighting, ill-treating animals, living in filth of body and superstition of mind. Mind you, I do not dislike the people myself—in their place. I enjoy their cheerful wit, and I grant that when they are not incited by professional agitators, they are quiet enough, and industrious too, many of them."

"The last Land Act did more to make 'em industrious than anything else," said Keane.

"You spoke of dirt," put in Con. "I was surprised to find so few hovels—cabins—around here. Between Rathcarrig and Keownstown I notice plenty of ruined cabins, but hardly one inhabited. Perhaps better times are coming in this direction too."

"The young people won't stand the old conditions nowadays," said Keane. "You will notice a few of the old people hanging on to their wretched birth-places. But once they die these fall down."

"I see," said Mr. Willoughby, "that O'Hickie is beginning to build a lodge or two on his place. You will not find it a good investment," he added to Con.

It is not necessary to follow their conversation further, for they fell to discussing the new Labourers' Cottage Act and kindred matters, interesting enough to men who lived and worked among the scenes and conditions of which they spoke, but of little moment in a book whose main purpose is to describe the life and surroundings of Con O'Hickie, the new comer.

CHAPTER VIII

A year before, Con would have awaked the next morning with a half-pleasant, half-uncasy feeling in his solar plexus, uncertain for a moment of its origin, and recalling a second after that he had met—for the *n*th time, and for the second time within a few weeks—the perfect girl of his imagination. But in sober fact he woke up suddenly at a quarter to seven without a thought for the charmer. He leapt out of bed in a hurry, for he was in danger of being late for the bell, which was rung every morning at seven o'clock by Spellissey. There was a certain knack in pulling the chain which old Spellissey possessed, half crippled though he was with rheumatism ; and this gift was not for all, as Con and his men would perceive with amusement when Spellissey occasionally permitted some tyro, scornful of the need for skill, to perform the office.

The dinner-party at Rivervale had disturbed the routine into which Con had already fallen. It was his habit to think out each night the details of the next day's work, so that he might meet the men at the morning bell ready with definite and unhesitating orders for each one. He disliked indecision in itself—let no one believe in the possibility of setting a dozen men to work to the best economic advantage without previous consideration, except, of course, when the day's tasks are a mere repetition of those of the day before. He had already gained a reputation

with the men as a person who knew his own mind. He had, moreover, a reputation for punctuality, a habit the workers were beginning to respect and reciprocate, though not without some early symptoms of rebellion, soon overcome by Con, by dint of precept vigorously practised.

To-day he had his body to clothe and his mind to make up in the short space of fifteen minutes. Spellissey's omission to call him as usual at 6.30 also perplexed him and called for explanation.

None of the petty misfortunes which delay hurried man in his toilet were wanting that morning, from the shirt which has mysteriously become inside out to the rotten bootlace which breaks as it is about to be tied. He reached the yard late by a few minutes. The men, all punctual on this occasion, stood for the most part in an aimless group, one or two only finding occupation in the stables and cowhouse, where there was a daily routine to be carried out.

"Damn it," he burst out, "why didn't you call me this morning?"

Spellissey's face wore a comical expression, a kind of leer, provocative of laughter as much as of wrath.

"Well, sir," he replied, "I thought it was no harm to let you sleep it out for this once, and you so late home last night."

Con was really more angry with himself than with Spellissey; being late always irritated him in a peculiar way. Spellissey, however, was the immediate object of his somewhat unreasonable wrath. He picked up a fork as if to strike him, as he said:

"How the hell do you expect me to get anything done here if you neglect the simplest thing you have to do? Were you going to let these fellows stand colloquing here all morning while I slept it out?"

"No, sir," Spellissey replied, still self-composed, and with his queer grin. "I was just about putting them to clean up this yard till you'd come out. 'Tis a job you're inclined to neglect yourself, begging your honour's pardon," he added, seeing Con approach him menacingly.

"For heaven's sake, drop the 'your honour,'" snapped Con, turning aside to issue his orders.

"That's what comes of trying to do a good turn," muttered the old man.

"That's what comes of wanting to keep half the men in the place idle," said Con over his shoulder.

"Well, well, 'tis a queer world," soliloquized Spellissey, as he went away to milk the cows.

Con went back to his breakfast, not too well pleased with himself. His temper was too hot, and he knew it; "but," he reflected, "if I didn't barge a bit sometimes I wouldn't get half as much done—and everyone who barges is in the wrong as often as not."

He was not much troubled by the post, and he left his accounts and correspondence for the nights, grudging to lose any but wet days in indoor work, while so much called for his attention outside. Unlike most of the people in his position he had no steward; he did his own stewarding, and lived, in fact, the life of a working farmer. There was this difference, however, between him and his neighbours: while they spent a good deal of their time (except at the busy seasons) doing nothing, Con was always doing something. The hours they spent at Keownstown or Killeely in desultory conversations, while engaged on some trivial message which did not really need their attention, he occupied with pick or shovel or saw, and occasionally with his gun.

To-day he ate his porridge in peace, but his meals

were seldom free from interruptions. He shouted to Lally to bring in the rashers, but they were scarcely on the table, fresh and sizzling from the kitchen fire, when Pat O'Brien's head appeared above the window, sill. He tapped on the pane, putting his face close to the glass.

"There's a shoe off the black horse," he shouted.

"You had a right to tell me that when I was in the yard," roared Con.

"What'll I do at all?" inquired Pat, after an interval, in the same loud tones.

"Send Johnny to the forge with him and tackle the old mare yourself till he comes back," said Con.

Such interruptions had no effect on his temper.

He finished, and went out, hardly waiting to light his pipe. Taking up a grubber, he went off towards a distant field, where some of the men were grubbing furze bushes and rooting boulders preparatory to ploughing the land in the coming Spring.

His way lay through the woods, for the field was on the high ground towards the mountain. He took little heed of his surroundings as he went, though there was a strange beauty calling for observation in the thick hollies, in the primeval oaks, their boughs all overgrown with moss and ferns, and in the weird and ancient hazels whose branches intertwined above his path: he had likened them on his first walk there to gnarled dwarfs carrying on a ceaseless strife, with their crooked arms interlocked in combat, beneath the giants which towered above them, motionless and oblivious of their wrangling. On all sides, where the trees were not too thick, were masses of russet bracken. As he emerged from the wood hard by his destination, a sudden gleam of winter sunshine turned the russet to a burnished copper. Intent as he

was on utilitarian schemes, in which such visions had no place, he could not but notice this, and, looking back over the top of the wood through which he had just passed, he saw for the first time the peculiar charm of the birches in winter : their topmost branches, still damp from the morning's mist, stretched away a sheet of purple-brown to the river-side, the deep plum-coloured shade of the tops lightening to the rare pink of autumn roses in the pale light of the low sun. Below, the winding river shewed here and there a streak of silver marking the boundary of his territory.

The mist was fast rolling away, and already as he joined the men a glimpse of distant violet mountains could be seen to the north.

He saluted the workers with, " God bless the work."

" You're welcome, sir," was the reply—the unchanging and never-omitted formula of the less anglicized parts of our country. After a few remarks on the subject of the work in hand he joined in the labour ; and right heartily he worked, accelerating the pace of the others in no small degree by his example. The furze bushes, whose glorious gold in early summer time makes the Irish countryside as splendid a blaze of colour as the boasted pink of Japanese gardens, lay now mere uprooted stumps on the surface of the mossy field.

" There's plenty of them on the ditches," Con said to himself, in justification of his vandalism in destroying so much potential beauty.

" 'Twill be a long time before Jerry-Ned and Mick Kennedy above will grub as much furze as we've done here in a week," said Tim MacDwyer, as if he had read Con's thoughts and wished to add further arguments to combat the momentary fit of aestheticism

which the insistent beauty of the woods had produced in his master.

"What's the name of those mountains away there to the north?" asked Con.

"Faith, I don' know, sir," answered Tim.

"Nor I," said Con. "I don't even know the name of the one above us here."

Tim was not illuminating on the subject of topography.

"Kennedy's mountain we calls it," he said.

"But surely it has a name," said Con.

"Sure, Kennedy's mountain is the name does be on it and 'tis name enough I'd be thinking."

"But it couldn't be marked Kennedy's mountain on the map," Con objected. "Supposing Kennedy was to sell it, for instance, the name would be wrong."

"Indeed then," said Tim, "Mick Kennedy will be in the poorhouse ten times over, and his wife taking tinkers for lodgers, before he'd sell that land, bad and all as it is. He'd as lief lose his life as his land. Sure his family has it since the old times and before them. Look at," he added, pointing across the field, "the boys are stuck with that stone: 'tis as good for us go over and give them a hand."

They went across to help at the place he indicated. A rock, a ton or more in weight, was being lifted by means of the leverage of a long pole, but it was too heavy for less than four men to manipulate.

"You'd never believe they were so big till you have the ground cleared from around them," said Con, "we had a right to get a blast of powder for them."

"Show me the sledge," said Tim, "and maybe we'll crack it in two as quick as any shot."

He seized the sledgehammer and began to deal mighty blows upon a chosen spot of the rock, spying

a fissure in its composition. Con followed in his turn, revelling in the violent exercise, and handed the hammer to another after a minute's onslaught. Each continued the vigorous attack for a brief space, and at the first blow which Tim dealt, on his turn coming round again, the streak in the rock became a crack and it fell asunder in two parts.

"Great little fellow, Tim," they cried, though each had contributed to the victory, and the pieces were lifted and rolled on to the "sleigh," to be dragged to the headland at the end of the field—ultimately to become if not the quoins and cornerstones of Con's building operations, at least the material for them.

And so till dinner-hour at twelve o'clock. There was little time for talk as they worked. Con wanted to sound his men as to the conditions of their life, of which he knew little as yet, beyond the actual circumstances of their working hours. Although he had remained silent at dinner the previous night, he had listened closely and pondered much during his drive home. Tim, who lived at some distance from his work, was in the habit of eating his dinner at Spel-lissey's, so that their ways now lay together.

"Is it any harm to ask what you have for dinner?" Con began.

"Bread and butter and tea," said Tim. "Sometimes I haven't butter."

"I suppose you've your dinner at night, when you can't go home for it," said Con.

"Yerra, breakfast, dinner and tea, 'tis nearly all a case," said Tim philosophically. "At home I gets spuds and cabbage instead of bread and butter."

"What about meat, though?" Con asked him.

"'Tis seldom enough I gets a taste of it," he replied. "'Long bottom'—that's what we call American

bacon—gives a taste to the cabbage whenever I make a week without broken time. 'Tis hard enough to manage with a house full of small childer, but God knows I'm not complaining. 'Tis well to get work at all, these times ; odd jobs are no good to a man if the day's hire is good in itself. Before you came here I was looking for a job on the roads, but I had no pull with them that has the giving of it. So I worked here and there with the farmers when they were busy, and picked up a job, with and with, where I could when times were slack. If I earned a pound one week I often had to make it do for a fortnight."

"What we want is to find wet day work," said Con, reflecting on what Tim had said. "'Tisn't easy get jobs for a dozen men with all the rain we have here."

"I was thinking, sir," said Tim, with some hesitation, "that it might be no harm to cut a few of the trees where they're thickest. 'Twould keep us all going to be cutting them up on wet days, and you could sell firing flying in Killeely : turf is getting very scarce ; and if you did that, sir," he went on, with something of the obsequious deference which it had already become Con's ardent wish to eradicate, "there's not a mother's son within five miles of this place would not be praying for you every night."

"I'll think it over," said Con as they reached the yard. Spellissey the ever-wise should be consulted.

"I wonder," he thought to himself, "does old Willoughby, or even Dick Keane, ever talk much to their men. I suppose they'd say I'm only laying myself open to be made a fool of by doing it. Anyway I don't care if I am. I want to get to the bottom of these problems, and there's no other way that I can see except by letting the men see that we don't want to be eternally getting the best of them. I have nearly

two hundred pounds a year ; my God ! that's four pounds a week, besides what I hope to make out of this place, and I don't find I've anything to chuck about with no family to support. Tim has eight children, I think, and eleven shillings a week : say, fourteen shillings with perquisites. I'll raise them a shilling next week, and let Willoughby and the rest of them say I'm spoiling the market if they like. I believe it will pay me, too, I believe it will pay me."

"This is the very day for a shot in the bog," he thought suddenly. "If a man with four pounds a week can't take a half-holiday occasionally he's a fool." And away he went to get gun and cartridges.

CHAPTER IX

Con's cocker spaniel, Rory, already a faithful friend and ally, raced round him in wild delight at the prospect of an unexpected evening's sport. Con himself was almost as light-hearted as his dog. He always found it hard to tear himself away from the absorption of his daily occupations, but, when he did, he enjoyed every moment intensely, and vowed he would spend every day rough-shooting; a resolution, needless to say, quite forgotten when work began again next morning.

All around Rathcarrig, interspersed between the farmlands, lay miles of boggy and irreclaimable country. A young man, accustomed to hard exercise and for whom shooting owed its fascination rather to a combination of bird-lore and skill than to mere proficiency with the gun alone, could hardly desire a more perfect territory for his expeditions. Wet, rushy hollows, hidden away in unexpected corners of pastures and meadows, might be trusted unfailingly to hold a wisp of snipe, but were only to be discovered after years of exploration; on all sides cut-away bogs were to be found in the folds of the lower hills, which not only snipe, but duck and teal, frequented. The rivers were in some places a continuous chain of small lakes: and some of these were certain haunts of duck, while others never held anything but an occasional baldcoot. And the wide stretches of turf-bog, scenes of busy industry in summer and autumn, had each

their own peculiarities and their likely spots. Con, of course, knew little as yet of all these happy hunting grounds. He had scarcely travelled, in the few half-days of relaxation he had allowed himself, further than the rushy glens below Barnagweeha Chapel, or beyond the big bog of Glenowan, which stretched out beside the river within sight of his own house.

He began well on this afternoon. Calling Rory to heel, he stole along the path through the lower woods leading to the river. As he had hoped, there were pigeons in the topmost branches of the thick firs, and startled by a sudden, sharp sound of his foot upon a brittle twig, they burst from their lofty perch with a loud clapping of wings, darting round behind the tree-tops almost before Con could catch a glimpse of them. With one quick movement he brought his gun to his shoulder and fired both barrels; the first brought down its bird; the second missed. The report startled another pair of pigeons from their hiding-place in a tree behind him; he loaded with clumsy haste, but too late to fire.

"More haste less speed," he muttered, Occasionally proverbs and popular adages are not also popular fallacies.

"Heel up, you divil you," he shouted to Rory, whose zealous impatience had got the better of him.

Rory returned, crestfallen. "You must get one stroke of this strap to teach you not to run in," said Con, suiting the action to the word. Rory took his not very severe punishment without a sound. Then he was sent off to "seek dead," and returned with the dead pigeon.

Con liked to get something for his bag at the first shot, for he felt he could salute any casual person he might meet without the necessity of owing to an

empty bag on receiving the inevitable inquiry as to his luck. He was not a crack shot, enthusiast though he was ; and he was, moreover, in spite of the veneer of self-confidence he tried to assume, a very self-conscious young man. A lucky first shot often had a good effect on his whole day.

He went on now through the wood with less care for noiselessness, letting Rory range through the undergrowth on each side of the path. Two pheasants went away out of range, and, just as he was emerging into the meadows alongside the river, a woodcock got up almost at his feet and slid with its swerving flight between the tree-trunks. Con fired, but a sudden change in the cock's course deceived him, and he was left to reflect how he would have been sure to have hit him if only he could have had the chance again.

They set off now along the bank of the river towards the place where it widened out around the island into two broad, sluggish courses. There lay the bog he was making for. His way thither was not uneventful. As the river approached the bog the banks became muddy and grew a thick margin of reeds. Here he had missed an easy shot the last day he was out. But a rare chance favoured him to-day. Further down the stream something frightened a pair of heavy duck from their hidingplace in the rushes and he was lucky enough to see them rise. He crouched under cover of the tall reeds and awaited them as they approached with ever-increasing speed. He was well hidden, and they did not deviate from their course ; and, after a few moments of exquisite suspense, the double report of his gun put a sudden stop to the whistling whirr of their wings in the air, and they fell, the first with the motion of an aeroplane descending, the second with a headlong collapse and a loud smack

as it hit the surface of the water. Rory, released from his attitude of rigid expectancy, plunged into the river and retrieved a duck and mallard, and Con began to be conscious of a pleasant weight in his load. After a "right and left" the fowler feels that he cannot miss, and Con was astonished and vexed with himself when a "magpie" duck rose from the reeds further on and fell to his gun, only to dive instantly beneath the surface and be no more seen. He waited vainly, knowing that he had hit her in the wing, and a minute later he saw her serenely paddling towards the rushes on the far side of the river a hundred yards further on.

"Her wing will soon mend, but she'll hardly be fool enough to let herself be fired at again, I bet," he said to himself as he went on to the bog.

It had begun to rain steadily, obliterating the distant mountains and covering the whole country with a cloak of unrelieved grey. Already his cartridges were getting damp, sore trial to the fowler when he wants to load in a hurry and the cases stick obstinately in the barrels of his gun. However, the snipe were plentiful, and he plodded over the heavy, sodden ground, often up to his knees in water, and once sinking deeply with one leg in a boghole, the other fortunately being on safe ground.

He shot a couple of snipe, and expended a good many cartridges ineffectively into the bargain. "A miss makes twice as much noise as when you kill," he reflected, and he wondered whether old Alban O'Brien was at home listening to his banging.

The thought of Alban reminded him that he was wet through, and he decided that he would pay the old man a visit in his ruin, for he delighted to hear his amusing talk, and he would also find a fire there at which to dry himself before he set out on his return

journey by the road. The evenings were now too dark for a safe passage by the way he had come.

Alban was an old man, white-haired and wrinkled, but still vigorous and strong as a bull. Little was known about him by his neighbours, except that his father had been evicted by Mr. Willoughby's predecessor, and that he had left the district as an infant. He was reported to have been a sailor and a soldier of fortune in South America, but he was himself silent about his past, a decided American accent alone giving any valid clue as to the scenes of his earlier life. Alban O'Brien had come to Glenowan some ten years before, and after a few months spent in working for various farmers, and quarrelling with each in turn, he had squatted unhindered by anyone in this ivy-covered ruin on the river's edge, surrounded by a great waste of bogland, and approached only by a grass-grown track which was once the road to the long deserted fishing or shooting lodge. With an industry he had not shown while working for hire, Alban had proceeded to repair a portion of the house, and he now lived in comparative warmth and dryness in the two rooms he had reclaimed. If he had any income no one knew its source. His only visible means of support were his gun and his rod, and in the use of both of these he was a master.

As Con approached in the gathering dusk he noticed two boats drawn up at the slip, and he knew that Alban must be at home, though he did not guess that he already had a visitor, the owner of the second boat.

There was no halldoor and the hall itself was almost pitch-dark, but as he entered, Con saw a chink of light over the door on his right. He knocked and went in.

A bright fire of turf and sticks blazed on the open hearth, and by its light he perceived that Alban was

not alone, but that a girl was sitting with him at the fireside. Alban rose from his seat as Con entered and peered at him to see who he was.

"A bad evening, Mr. O'Hickie ; you're welcome, sir," he said, as he recognized him. "I'm glad to see you're inclined to pay me a visit sometimes. 'Tis seldom I have so much company. I suppose you don't know Miss Mary here," he added, as Con approached the fire.

The girl got up, and to his surprise he recognized his acquaintance of the night before, Mary Lalor.

"Indeed I do," he said, as he shook hands with her ; "only last night I had the pleasure of hearing her telling Mr. Willoughby all sorts of home truths."

Almost before he had uttered the words he felt that he had made a foolish remark. He seldom felt at ease in the presence of comparative strangers, and now the unexpectedness of his encounter with Mary Lalor increased the gaucheness which he never failed to perceive in himself, but which he could not overcome. He felt his face get hot as he spoke, trivial though the occasion really was.

At the mention of Willoughby's name Alban seemed to stiffen somewhat, but he said, "She's a good warrant to tell the truth, whoever she's speaking to, are you not, Miss Mary ? You're wet, Mr. O'Hickie. Draw in to the fire and dry yourself."

They talked for a while of shooting, and Con was glad of a fairly good bag to show before so critical an audience. Mary Lalor was herself a good shot, though on this occasion she had been out in the boat without a gun and had sought shelter in O'Brien's ruin from the rain.

When Alban went outside for some more fuel Con reminded Mary of the conversation between herself

and Mr. Willoughby. He told her of the talk he had had that morning with Tim MacDwyer, and asked her had she yet formulated an answer to Mr. Willoughby's challenge.

"There's nothing harder," she said, "than to make people see the point of view of the other side, in this country, anyway, and I suppose it's the same everywhere. You saw what I was up against last night, and it's the same thing at the other extreme with old Alban O'Brien here."

"Why! I thought Alban was a sort of Unionist himself," Con interposed.

"He is in a way," Mary replied, "at least in so far as he's anti-Nationalist; but at the same time he can't or won't see that there is anything to be said for a landlord at all. I tell him how the incomes of many landlords fell to half the old figure in the bad times, while the same charges had to be paid out of the property; how many of them were ruined by this, usually the best of them. He won't see that there is any distinction between turning a family on the roadside because they are in possession of a Naboth's vineyard, and evicting a lazy ruffian who lets his land degenerate into a wilderness and refuses to pay any rent whatsoever. It seems to be my lot to expound opposing points of view to extremists."

"You evidently have the fatal faculty of being able to see all round a question," said Con.

"So I'd never make a politician," said she.

He said he hated politics.

"Personally," said Mary, "I think it's the duty of everyone to take an interest in politics. More interest in politics and less interest in politicians is my formula. After all, politics is the science of the State, and no one except a well-paid government official without a con-

science can pretend that the State is anything but in a rotten condition in this country."

"I've always looked upon it as a sort of profession," said Con, "and a profession suited to a certain type of bully with a gift of the gab."

"So it is, and will be as long as intelligent people adopt the attitude you are expressing," she replied.

"They ought to let women into Parliament," said Con, "there'd be less cynicism then and less jobbery."

"If we could persuade the men to do their duty it would be enough," was her rejoinder.

Con laughed—"I never bother much about duty," he said, "unless it be my Easter Duty! Tell me now what do you call the duty of the ordinary man. Take me now, for instance."

"Well, I hardly know you yet, so 'tis not for me to lecture you on your duty. I hear that you are already putting some of my pet theories into practice without any lecturing at all."

"Whatever I may be doing in practice (and Heaven knows 'tis little enough) I am quite theory-free," said Con, "I certainly hold the opinion that a man who has land should get the best out of it and give as much employment as possible, but I think that covers it all as far as theory goes."

Alban returned with some sods of turf which he put on the fire. "There's many a one," he said by way of comment on Con's remark, "who gets the most out of his land without putting back a ha'porth into it or giving any employment either, more'n to work his sons day and night without payment."

"Miss Lalor was just going to tell me what a man like me, with a big place on his hands, ought to do with it," said Con.

"You're trying to put me in the same corner as Mr. Willoughby did last night," said she.

"If you scruple to be a preacher you'll never make converts," Con said.

"I'm a convert myself," said she.

"To what or whom?"

"To the doctrines of rural regeneration taught by Æ every week in *The Homestead* and in his books."

"O Lord," Con exclaimed, and he confessed to ignorance of Æ's exsistence and was enlightened. Alban was scathing in his view.

"He's a fellow has a job in some new department, believe you me, Mr. O'Hickie. Miss Lalor takes a pamphlet as greedy as a trout takes a 'claret' on a showery day in April."

"No one could preach with a sceptic like Alban in the congregation," said Mary.

"There is more joy over one sinner . . .," said Con. "I'm a sinner, as well as Alban, and if you can bring me to repentance let him look after himself. After all, he doesn't own a large demesne, and what he has he has made for himself. Alban is certainly exempt from all rules and conventions."

"'Tis I'm the queer fish," said Alban, "'tis I'm the great old fellow, entirely," he added, half to himself.

Mary told Con, not without a running fire of disparaging criticism from Alban of almost every individual concerned, how she had first discovered *The Homestead*; how she had persuaded the curate, Father Hehir, against the wishes of Father Mulryan, the parish priest, to call a meeting in Killeely to listen to an address by an organizer from Dublin; how the Killeely Co-operative Society had resulted from this meeting. She recounted the machinations of the Hoorer faction to procure the downfall of the society; the personal jealousies which at one time had nearly

wrecked the whole project, and the steadfast determination of Father Hehir, whose early lukewarmness had developed into energetic enthusiasm.

"Between Father Hehir and a few of the committee men who are as honest and keen as himself we pulled the thing through," she said, "and now it's been running for two years and is going ahead well."

"'Twas only yesterday," put in Alban, "I was in Henry Hector's bar beyond, and I heard himself say out loud enough that he didn't care a *tráinín* for the Co-operative. He said it was a thing that he could smash it whenever he chose, but it didn't suit him to do it presently. But the day would come when it would. He's out with Father Hehir on the head of it, though the way he does be hobnobbing with old Father Joe would sicken you. You'll have to leave the boat here to-night," he added suddenly to Mary Lalor, "for 'tis too dark now to row home and the rain is as bad as ever."

"May I see you home?" Con asked her, and they decided to set off at once while there was still light enough to enable them to cross the bog in safety.

They traversed the mile or so of rough track in silence, save for occasional remarks on the subject of the path. The light west wind blew the soft but steadily falling rain against their cheeks almost with a caress, for there was no cold in the weather, though it was mid-winter. At length the bohíreen began to rise steeply towards the Keownstown road, and in a few minutes they turned to the right, on to the comparatively easy going of the main road.

It did not require Alban's joking reference to Mary Lalor's partiality to pamphlets to make Con see that she was a born propagandist, and that she had a vein of pedantry in her. He had, in fact, already made a

fairly accurate estimate of her character, though he had yet to learn something of its many contradictory traits. He knew instinctively that she was a girl with whom he could never flirt, which piqued him a little and made her more attractive to him. He could see that she had brains, and that she was capable in practical affairs, but he thought her almost irritating in her earnestness: the sort of woman who under different circumstances might have been a successful lady doctor, or plunged into rescue work in the slums of London or Dublin. But she found herself in the position of having to manage her mother's farm at Killeely, and contact with the country people, with the land, and with nature, preserved the human element in her.

Connected talk had become possible again, and Con said:

"I was very much interested in what you were telling me below at Alban's about the co-operative business; but you've dodged your obligation, up to this, of telling me how to proceed at Rathcarrig."

"You keep on pressing me," she replied, "so I suppose it's up to me to say something: suppose you began by joining our co-operative society; read Æ's *Co-operation and Nationality* to get a grasp of what is behind the movement—it's more than a mere trading movement, you'll find. Then when you're interested, as I believe you will be, we'll perhaps be able to put our heads together to see what can be done on our little patch of earth here to realize the ideals which lurk behind creameries and co-operative stores. As for me," she added, "I have a fairly free hand with the farming, but my mother puts her foot down if I suggest any innovations."

Mary beguiled the road with a description of the

people she had met in Dublin, and especially the "unwashed gods" to whom Mr. Willoughby had so contemptuously referred. Con was surprised to hear of "intellectuals" interested in butter and bacon.

A couple of miles brought them to Con's back gate, but he made no movement to turn aside and leave Mary to walk the rest of the way home by herself. It was she who stopped when she perceived this.

"Don't you know your own gate in the dark?" she said with a laugh.

"I do, of course," he replied, "but I thought you said I might walk home with you."

"Sure, I'm nearly home now, and surely you don't think I'm afraid to be out alone at night."

"The road from here to Killeely is very lonely," he said.

"What about it!" she remarked cheerfully.

"Anyway, I'm coming," Con insisted, setting forward again.

At the end of another mile they reached the lodge gate of Rathcarrig, and here Mary refused to be any further escorted, declaring that her own gate was only at the other end of the street, and that it would be ridiculous for Con with his gun and gamebag to go another step out of his way.

Con gave in, not altogether unwillingly, for he was wet, and the avenue before him was long, and on a night like this very dark. As he groped his way along through the wood, his eyes not upon the ground, but straining to follow the line of less black darkness between the tree-tops on either side of the road, he began to find his gun an encumbrance to his progress, and to feel the weight of his bag, which bumped against his side as he walked and cut into his shoulder with its narrow strap. Rory paddled along behind him with steady, pattering feet.

"Mary Lalor is not quite girlish enough and just a bit too earnest," he reflected as he traversed an open space where the way did not demand his whole attention. "All the same, it was worth while coming round," he said to himself—"even though I couldn't see her in the dark," he added, rather ungraciously for a lady's cavalier. At the same moment the object of his reflections was taking off her wet clothes in the old nursery which she still used as her bedroom. She also was thinking of her companion, but only to contrast him, and not too favourably, with a man who was more than twice his age and as yet unknown to him.

Con trudged on, more than once stumbling over stones and tree-stumps at the roadside, for where the wood was thickest the branches met overhead and left no outline to guide him. But soon a lighted window, intensifying the darkness of the night, shone out from the house through the trees to welcome him, and he pushed on, eager for the blazing fire and square meal which awaited him after his tramp through the gloom and splashing rain.

CHAPTER X

The things of which Mary Lalor had spoken familiarly were new to Con, and their assimilation in their fuller meaning was a slow process ; the glamour of purely individual effort and the pride of personal ownership, which affected him strongly when working on his own lines at Rathcarrig, turned his mind for weeks together from the ideas which Mary first instilled into him on that walk home from Glenowen bog. But he both joined the Kilteely Co-operative Society and bought and read the books which Mary had recommended.

He did not meet her again for some time, but he had already seen enough of her to be considerably impressed. He had, of course, come across clever young women at Trinity, but he thought that this was the first time he had met one with ideas.

He admired her immensely, as who could not ; for she was a pleasant girl to look upon, tall, slender, active and lissom as a boy in her movements, and possessed of a clear, mountain-given complexion, which made her features of little moment to the beholder, pretty though they undoubtedly were. Nevertheless, prone as Con was to headlong loves, Mary's charm of manner and grace of figure did not spontaneously touch the incomprehensible spring in his heart. The cause of this was undoubtedly Peggy Folane. She was the first to lift the wand of enchant-

ment, and Con, though he was capable of the villainy of "off with the old love and on with the new," could not, for all the sweetness of his first impression of Mary, compass the feat of falling in love with two girls almost simultaneously.

Since the night of the dance at Keownstown Con had neither seen nor heard tidings of Peggy, though a fortnight had now elapsed, and he had often thought of her with a thrill of sweet recollection. He had, however, let it rest at that and had taken no steps to renew her acquaintance. His meetings with Mary now, curiously enough, instead of, as might have been expected, causing the eclipse of Peggy in his mind and the relegation of the incident with her to the category of a pleasant flirtation, produced exactly the opposite effect. As he walked home after leaving Mary Lalor at Kilteely House, the recollection of Peggy Folane came to him most vividly, and he determined to see her again at the earliest possible moment.

"Anyone but a fool would be in love with Miss Lalor," he said to himself, half laughing. "But I declare to God Peggy's the sweetest thing in creation."

He had no need to bother himself about ways and means of seeing her again, for, by the very next morning's post, he received a letter which, though the actual words expressed no such sentiment, made him hope that Peggy, too, was anxious to see him again. It ran thus :

KILCORMAC, KEOWNSTOWN,
Feb. 1, 1907.

A CHARA,

There is to be an Irish class held here at the school on every Tuesday night from this out.

We have secured Padraig O Loinsigh, the Irish teacher from Limerick, to give the class. Now I

know you have not yet any Irish classes (except for the children) at Kildeely, and I thought maybe you might like to continue the lessons you began so well. Of course, 'tis a long drive in, and you may not think it worth your while, but anyway it was mentioned at the meeting on Sunday that you and Father Hehir might care to attend, and I write this letter in my capacity as Secretary of the Keownstown Gaelic League. 'Tis out of deference to your lack of knowledge of the language that I write you this in English, not in Irish.

Mise do chara,
PEIG NI FUALAIN
(Peggy Folane.)

Father Hehir counted twenty-four miles on a winter's night too far to be driving on an open car for the sake of an hour's Irish lesson ; but Con had more powerful reasons than the curate for joining the Keownstown Gaelic League, and this he did.

For several weeks he persevered, riding his horse the long twelve miles each way, and gathering Tuesday by Tuesday some little smattering of our language—most difficult to acquire after childhood. But Peggy, the primary object of his journeys, was inaccessible. As secretary of the League she was always busily engaged when he arrived, and at the conclusion of the class she was the centre of a group of learners, who made up for their small numbers by the boundlessness of their enthusiasm. On one occasion he made a point of reaching the schoolhouse before any of the others could be there. He was rewarded by having to wait in the rain until someone came to open the door, and when Peggy appeared it was in the company of O'Loinsigh. She was always friendly, even cordial,

with Con, but he could never succeed in getting more than a word or two with her alone, and then only on the subject which had ostensibly brought him to Keownstown. He began to be annoyed with himself and with her, and to think that he had been quite mistaken in attempting to read between the lines of her letter. There were moments when he felt sure he was being played with ; and others when he believed that he had a successful rival in the teacher. At the same time, much as he disliked the effort of travelling the long, dark road in and out of Keownstown, he could not bring himself to give up his weekly journey ; partly because the frustration of his real object piqued him and made him more anxious to become intimate with Peggy, and partly because the spirit of the handful of young men and women who eagerly toiled at mastering a most difficult language had begun to infect him in real earnest. Their evident belief in it convinced him that he was not wasting his time, even if he omitted Peggy from consideration altogether.

And Peggy, for all her aloofness and apparent indifference, was watching him closely. Her innate good breeding and taste were obscured in those early days by the veneer of cheap gentility, at times almost amounting to vulgarity, which she, in common with the other better circumstanced girls of the town, had acquired from her environment. There had been hitherto no refining influences in her life ; on the contrary, her natural refinement of manner had been to some extent blunted as her grace of bearing had not. But there had never been a time when she had not shewn flashes of her true self, and it wanted only the coming of some new element into her life to open her eyes to the shoneenism of her previous associates and to bring out the better side of her. This process

the Gaelic League had already begun and Con O'Hickie had unwittingly continued.

At their first meeting at the dance she had been quite as much influenced by his personality, however unheroic had been his conduct, as he had been attracted by her pretty face and, to his experience, novel point of view. She liked him so much that she had made little opposition when he kissed her, and, indeed, before he left for his twelve mile walk she had played her part in the game of lovemaking as readily as he. But, unlike Con, she had felt a reaction the next day : she was not, as he was, "an old hand." She considered, in fact, that she had made herself very cheap, and she felt in consequence somewhat humiliated. Nevertheless, no sooner did she begin to feel small than she began also to experience a longing to feel small again in the same manner. And so, cunningly enough, she had contrived that Con should be invited to join the class, and in such mood her letter to him was penned.

Con's coming, however, in turn produced a reaction in her mind. She knew well from his manner at the Keownstown dance that he cared little or nothing for the Gaelic League, in whose hopes and ideals all she held dear was bound up. Therefore he came because she had invited him to come, and because he would see her at the classes. So can be easily explained her aloofness and at the same time her friendly manner to him. She resolved that he should first prove his adhesion to the cause she believed in, before he could expect any renewal of their previous relationship, which he now evidently wished to resume, and which she was not at all sure would satisfy her. His sincerity had to be proved, not by mere lip service, but by arduous personal discomfort and by real progress in the task to which he had put his hand.

March was already well in when she was able to assure herself that Con's devotion to her was now really reinforced by a determination to become an Irish speaker. She was indeed surprised at the strides he made. He advanced more quickly than any of the other learners, though several of them had possessed some knowledge of the language before the present series of classes had begun. She did not know that Con had in John Spellissey a native speaker who was also a very willing ally in his new-found project.

Probably his period of probation would have been longer had not Peggy happened to see in the morning paper an advertisement which interested her not a little. It was inserted by Mrs. Keane of Gortroe, and invited applications for the post of governess to her children. When she saw it Peggy could not deny to herself that she would like above all things in the world to secure that place, nor could she pretend that the reason was other than that it would mean being within easy reach of Rathcarrig and at a house often visited by Con. The occasion, too, for the breakdown of her reserve was favourable, for Con's horse was lame, and he had laboured in from Rathcarrig on his bicycle over rutty roads, not yet dried up by the east winds of March.

At the end of the class she freed herself from the usual knot of leaguers, telling them that she had to go a mile or so up the Kiltelly road to see the mother of a child who had recently been absent from school through sickness. Con was not slow to take the opportunity for which he had been waiting, and they soon shook off the one or two members of the class whose way home lay with theirs, and found themselves alone for the first time for six weeks.

" 'Twasn't fair of you," Con began. .

"What wasn't?"

"Never saying a word to me at all, all this long time."

"Don't you know I was busy organizing the class work," she said.

"How well you could get away to-night," he replied.

"I had to go see Mrs. Flanagan," she said, "and I was prevented earlier in the evening."

"I suppose you mean that," said Con, despondently.

"Of course I mean what I say, what do you want me to mean?"

"I want you to say what you said a couple of months ago, the night of the dance."

"I was foolish that night."

"According to my idea you were foolish ever since," he replied, "but somehow I hardly mean that. I fancy there's not much foolishness about you. 'Tis I'm the foolish one, thinking you were foolish."

"You're talking *ráiméis*," said Peggy.

"People do when they're in love," he grumbled.

"Oh, you'll get over that; every man falls in love and out of it again," said Peggy in as unconcerned a voice as she could assume.

"Some men may."

"Do you mean to suggest you're not one of that sort?"

Con hesitated a moment. "Maybe I was once, but since I met you I've begun to feel that I could qualify for first class honours in constancy."

"Time will tell," she said.

"Don't you give me credit," he asked, "for the way I've stuck it out: I've never missed a class since the beginning."

"I do," she answered, "but I hope it was the classes themselves were the attraction."

"Well, I may as well tell the truth ; it wasn't altogether wanting to learn the Irish language brought me to Keownstown every week ; I wanted to see you again."

"Then 'tis me, not the Irish, you came for ?"

"Whatever I say to that, you may be offended, so I'll tell the truth. 'Tis the only thing to do when in doubt."

Peggy laughed. "Tell the truth then," she said.

"Well, the truth is I came at first because of you, and I still come because of you, but now I come because of the Irish too, for besides wanting to please you it has taken a hold of me."

"You funny boy, how could so nice a speech offend me ?"

"Oh, I don't know ; you might have wanted it all for yourself, or you might have wanted it all for the language."

"Well, I like it the way you put it."

"Then you like me to admire you and want to please you."

"I don't say so."

"You don't say no."

"I said nothing at all."

"That's not enough ; tell me you like me to like you. I won't use the word love if you'd rather it."

"Everyone likes to be liked."

"Tell me you like specially to be liked by me."

"You know I do."

Con imagined he had won his battle to get back to the terms they were on at the dance, and thought to signalize his victory by repeating the kiss ; but Peggy showed a determination in refusing to let him do this which greatly increased his respect for her. In a moment he began to feel a reverence for the word

"love" which he had been using so lightly a minute or two before.

"Now," said Peggy, after they had walked a few yards in silence after this episode, "I'll tell you something. I'm thinking of giving up the school here."

"You're not going away?" said Con, aghast.

"I don't know yet, I might. I'd like your advice."

"Then don't go," said Con promptly.

"Wait till I tell you where I may be going to. Mrs. Keane of Gortroe wants a governess for her children and I'm thinking of looking for the post."

"I can't give you unbiassed advice," said Con, "I'd like that so much that I can only see one side of the question."

They were standing by this time on the road close to the cottage which Peggy had to visit, for her errand was no fictitious excuse. A step coming towards them in the darkness put an end to their talk, for when she heard it Peggy bade Con a quick good-night and crossed over to Mrs Flanagan's door. "Don't wait for me," she said, "I'll tell you next Tuesday what happens about Gortroe."

Con remained a few minutes sitting on the low wall, uncertain whether to do as she said or to wait for her to come out, so that he might take up the conversation again at the critical point it had reached. If he stayed he could pursue his advantage before she had time to repent of admitting him to the degree of intimacy which she had conceded by consulting him about her plans. On the other hand, she might be annoyed to find that he had not gone home—or she might be annoyed if he did. The problem perplexed him, so anxious had he become to please her and to find favour in her eyes. Finally he decided to go home.

For the moment, at least, he was in love, and the

realization of this made him whistle as he drove his bicycle at a wild pace over the muddy road. Once again he covered the twelve miles homeward in those wonderful seven-league boots. He flew along, making nothing of the hills and heavy going, and for the first time since he had walked home from the Keownstown dance the long road seemed to him but a few careless steps.

Peggy felt no such exuberance of spirits. What for Con was but the promise of a pleasant incident in his life, for her was a most serious step. She had said nothing to him of the sacrifice she was undoubtedly making in exchanging a certain and more or less independent position for one capable of being lost through no fault of her own ; but she was well aware of this, and it had only wanted some little trick of manner of thoughtless action on Con's part to make her abandon her precipitate scheme. Con, however, so far from doing anything to make her change her mind had unconsciously done just what was necessary to strengthen her in her purpose. So, as she walked slowly back to Keownstown, Peggy definitely decided to go to Gortroe, if Mrs. Keane would have her.

CHAPTER XI

In country places people who dine late in the evening on weekdays usually partake of a solid middle-day dinner on Sunday. The Keanes were no exception in this matter, and one Sunday in the spring Mrs. Keane was sitting at the fire, while her husband sprawled with his legs on the mantelpiece, smoking his after-dinner pipe with the air of a man who has not a care on his mind.

"I suppose Con O'Hickie will drop over this afternoon," he said.

"Do you notice he hardly misses a Sunday now, Dick. When he first left us he only came occasionally."

"Oh, I suppose he was so interested in getting settled at Rathcarrig that he hadn't time then. I'm glad to see him anyway, whenever he comes. He's just a bit too self-confident, perhaps, but I like him more the more I see of him, don't you?"

"To tell you the truth," Mrs. Keane replied, "though he comes so often I don't see much of him. He's so keen on the children, especially lately, that he spends all his time with them when he's not out about the place with you."

"I hope Miss Folane is not a danger!" said Dick.

"I've a shrewd suspicion that she's the attraction, not the children," his wife remarked.

"Oh, come. that's ridiculous, I was only chaffing; why, he's the most level-headed young fellow of his age I ever came across."

"The greater the fool then when he meets some girl or other," said Mrs. Keane.

"Well, all I can say is that you're generally right, in matters like this, but this time I think you're out. What's Paddy barking at now?" he added as an Irish terrier, a moment before apparently sound asleep on the hearthrug, bounded over to the window and stood there growling.

"Two people coming up the avenue," said Mrs. Keane, who had gone over to look out. "I can't see who they are: they're behind the laurels. Ah!" she exclaimed, "it's Con O'Hickie and Mary Lalor."

"I wonder did they meet by chance or did they walk over the whole way together," said Keane.

"The latter, I hope," was his wife's reply. "Now that would be a sign of level-headedness on Con's part. Just a proper match it would be. Their places adjoin one another, they're keen on country things, both Catholics, and the right age—she might be a year or two older than he."

"He's twenty-three, he told me," said Keane.

"Well, she is only twenty-five," said Mrs. Keane, "I'd like to see that come off."

"You're an old matchmaker; all women are the same," said Dick as he got up to go out to the door.

Con and Mary came in.

Con inquired after the children and asked a casual question about Miss Folane's health with such apparent indifference that Mrs. Keane was quite taken in. Her mind subconsciously bent itself to planning a joint future for her visitors.

Like Con and Dick Keane, Mary Lalor was a keen farmer. Her father had been dead some years, and it had devolved upon her to carry on the working of the lands of Kilteely House, which were now her mother's

for life, and would eventually become hers by the terms of her father's will. When, therefore, the usual Sunday walk of inspection was proposed she quite naturally made one of the party.

Mary and the two men set out across the bare fields. Keane had his farm in perfect order: smooth, square fields divided from one another by solid, furze-covered banks or wide walls of loose stones, well kept and massive. His gates were properly hung, his plantations well-fenced, his yard and haggard a model of tidiness. Con thought of his own tumbledown fences, his stony fields overgrown with furze and fern, the gaping holes in his roofs, and the tangle of picturesque but valueless timber and undergrowth in the woods at Rathcarrig. He was too much of a farmer not to concede the superiority of Gortroe, but he felt a vague satisfaction in reflecting that, whatever he did, he could never so improve Rathcarrig that it would become another Gortroe.

They had nothing to see in the fields, for the first signs of spring green had not yet appeared in the winter whiteness of the pastures, and in those days there was but little tillage on such farms as Gortroe. An acre or two of oats for the horses, a patch of potatoes for the house and the men, a small field of mangolds and turnips to provide winter feed for the cattle—these made up the whole of Keane's agricultural undertakings; for, as he often said to Con, "Why should I till when it means losing money, and I can at least make my rates and head rent and pay my wages out of grazing." So it was not agriculture but cattle-keeping which occupied Keane's time. Both Mary and Con had often inspected Keane's improvements, the levelling and draining and fencing at which he employed his men during the winter months, and to-day they were going to see his stock.

The bullocks were highly praised. They looked very well as they stood, each at his feeding-tub, munching a mixture of mangolds and chaffed hay. Con and Mary both touched Keane's weak spot and pleased his vanity when they valued the cattle a pound or so per head more than the actual price Keane had given for them the week before. They remained a few minutes talking of fairs and the current price of cattle and watching the bullocks at their ration. As each neared the bottom of his tub he would move away from it along the line till he came to a smaller beast, which he would dislodge with a vigorous push of his horn in the flank, only to find no more food in the conquered tub than in his own, when the same process would be repeated again further down the line; until at length, after innumerable interchanges of position and momentary incidental contests, even the most voracious bullock among them had satisfied himself that no scrap of food remained unconsumed; and by degrees the cattle moved off towards the shelter of the wall, under which some lay down to chew the cud with half-closed eyes, while others, less contented by nature and so slower to put on condition, wandered about in search of some bite of withered grass hitherto overlooked in their never-ending search.

Dick Keane and his friends had several lots to see, as well as a new plantation of larch, a recently purchased grass harrow, and other such things in which all three found an interest, unintelligible, perhaps, to people engaged in different ways of life. Time passed quickly, and when they returned to the house it was nearly six o'clock. Mrs. Keane had finished her tea and had not kept it waiting for the others.

"Dick prefers a whiskey and soda to tea," she told them, "and you two can go up to the schoolroom

Mr. O'Hickie is a great favourite with the children, so that you can be sure of a welcome at schoolroom tea, instead of enduring a cup of cold tannin here in the drawingroom."

"I know the way," said Mary.

"So do I," said Con, and away they went to the schoolroom.

They were greeted vociferously: "Hurra! here comes Mr. O'Hickie," shouted Jack, the eldest.

"He's my uncle Con," cried his sister Nancy.

In the confusion caused by their entrance Mary did not notice the slight embarrassment exhibited by Peggy, now established as governess to three imps, any one of whom would have been a handful to manage, even alone.

They were pacified and persuaded to continue their meal in comparative quiet only when Con promised to be Bagheera the panther as soon as they were finished. But on Sunday it was the custom of the house for the children to go down to the drawingroom for an hour after tea, and Con escaped with no more disturbance than dusty knees to his trousers, for his digestion was sound, permitting liberties to be taken with it, and not punishing violent exercise after meals with dire pains and penalties.

"I've a great wish for children," said Con, panting, as he removed the traces of the recent excursion into the jungle from his clothes and rumpled hair. "I like the children here especially, but a little goes a long way. I'm for sitting down here at this jolly fire for a bit. We can have a talk to Miss Folane, and then walk back so as to reach Killeely before it's quite pitch dark, if that will suit you."

"All right," said Mary, "I don't know Miss Folane at all, I hope we'll not all get bored with one another,

as I'm sure she'll take no interest in the things we generally talk about."

"She's a very interesting girl," said Con.

"You must know her then. You'd hardly speak so enthusiastically if you did not, yet she's only been here a few weeks. She wasn't here when I was over last, about a month ago."

"Was I enthusiastic? I only said she was interesting. Yes, I met her in Keownstown once or twice at the Gaelic League there."

Peggy returned at that moment. Con felt her charm more than ever as she came in, and no doubt the restraint he was bound to place upon himself added to the sweetness of her. She looked very fascinating in the simple dress she was wearing. Her black hair flowed back from the parting in long waves over her ears. Excitement and embarrassment were in her grey eyes, but her mouth wore a pleasant and quite unconcerned smile as she joined them at the fire. She did not sit down at once, but stood by the mantelpiece, and Con and Mary both noticed how gracefully she held herself; there was something in the poise of her body and the way she rested her shapely arm on a screen beside her which revealed a perfectly natural grace of bearing; a gift lavishly bestowed on the mountain-bred peasant girls of Kerry and the west, but seldom to be seen except as a painfully acquired art among the young ladies of the more well-to-do classes.

Mary had all the freshness of a girl born and reared in the country. She had the same clear complexion as Peggy, and she had the easy well-bred manner of an educated daughter of a gentleman, but she would never have stood as Peggy was standing there at the screen, nor could she have learnt to do it any more

than she could have copied the inimitable grace of Peggy's walk.

"Mr. O'Hickie has just been telling me," said Mary, "that he has been attending Gaelic League classes at Keownstown and that you're a member too."

"And now she's trying to make Gaels of Jack and Nancy and little Dick," said Con.

"A hard job I have, too," said Peggy. "They thought it fine fun at first and I had great hopes of them. But after the first few days they began asking me all sorts of questions about what good it was to be talking Irish; didn't Daddy and Mammy talk English, and all to that."

"Well, for that matter," said Mary, "I'm not sure that I'm not with them. I got bitten with the idea of learning Irish myself when I was in Dublin the year before last, but it was so dreadfully difficult that I gave it up. I have such a lot to do, and there are so many pressing things of really vital importance like the Dublin slums and consumption in the country, to be tackled, to say nothing of the finest literature in the world to be read in English, that I felt it was really a waste of time to take it up seriously. You can't deny that it absorbs all a person's energies to really become a speaker of Irish, or even to read Irish books, if there are any good original books in Irish."

Con and Peggy accepted the challenge simultaneously.

They began to speak at the same moment, but Con stopped, feeling that Peggy was on safer ground than he. Though a simple girl, she could be eloquent in her own way on this subject.

"Books are being written in Irish, and there's a new literature growing up," Peggy began. "Besides that, there are the old folk tales and translations from other languages.

"I daresay," said Mary, "but it's always better to read a book in the original if you can. As to the new literature, I have heard Gaelic enthusiasts talking among themselves and they didn't seem to think so very highly of it : so you must fall back on folk tales. A nation cannot live on its folk tales."

"You admit that Ireland is a nation then ?"

"Of course I do, but I do not see that it is necessary to speak a distinct language to be a distinct nationality. Look at America, for instance."

"America is not a nation," interjected Con, "it is a conglomeration of outcasts from Europe saved from degeneracy by two generations of exiles from Ireland."

They all laughed, but Mary, who had the unwomanlike qualities required in the chairman of a committee, tenaciously kept them to the point of the discussion.

"You're trying to dodge my arguments," she said, "by making smart remarks which you don't even believe in yourself. There's America, you can't deny. And then there's Switzerland. You must grant me Switzerland."

"One swallow does not make a summer."

"I can cite Belgium, too."

"Belgium has Flemish," said Con.

"Not as a national language," retorted Mary. "It has Walloon, too, but French is the national language ; the others are no more than *patois*."

"I can't argue with you on that point," said Con. "I don't know enough about Belgium."

"Then again," Mary went on, feeling she had the advantage, "Irish is practically a dead language, and it is a Herculean task to try and revive it. Is it wise to put all a nation's energy into a forlorn hope, when the same amount of effort in other directions would do wonders if only it could be directed aright. I

would keep Irish as a classical language, making it a basis of education just as Latin and Greek are in other countries. There is quite enough distinctiveness in what I may call Anglo-Irish to satisfy our aspirations for a distinctive manner of speaking. It would be much more feasible to speak in the language of Synge than in the language of the Four Masters."

Before she replied, Peggy pulled up a chair to the fire and sat down. The dusk was gathering in the room, and the flickering light of the fire surrounded them with an atmosphere favourable to talk.

"I'm glad you recognize the value of Irish as a language," she began.

"I said nothing against it as a language," replied Mary. "I was giving you my reasons for thinking it a bad policy."

"That is just where I disagree with you," said Peggy. "I love Irish as a language. It is beautiful on the tongue and it lends itself to any form of expression: equally well to love, poetry, and to science. But it is as a policy, as you call it, that I believe in it."

"Exactly," said Mary, "I thought so. But why? What good is it as a policy?"

Peggy replied: "I hope you won't think me silly and fanciful and sentimental when I say that it is the only means left to us by which the soul of Ireland can be regenerated. We are the most backward nation in Europe, people say. Certainly we are stagnant. Our people emigrate, our industries can hardly keep alive, even farming's in a bad way. What have we in exchange for this degeneration, for Ireland was not always like that? We have anglicization. The aim has been to stamp out Irish nationality, everything distinctive about the Irish people, to remould us in the image of the British people, and so to get rid of a

troublesome problem that has bothered England off and on for some centuries. No matter if prosperity and culture disappears. The means justifies the great end, and that end is to have Ireland a law-abiding English shire instead of a nest of turbulent and unreasonable natives. After all, it is only Irish culture and Irish prosperity which disappears in the process, so what matter? At the finish we are all to be British; once we are Britons we may prosper." A note of irony came into her voice as she continued: "And as to culture we will have the culture of England instead of our Irish barbarian ideas about civilization. We are to thank God at school that he has been pleased to bestow on us the great favour of being happy English children. Would you have us all West Britons, Miss Lalor?"

"No, I wouldn't, but we need not be West Britons because we speak English. I dislike West Britons as much as you do, I think."

"But that is just what we will become if we do not clutch on to what we have left of our own. We need some basis to work on in fighting anglicization: something to concentrate our attention. What else have we but the language? It is a symbol of all we once were; it is the treasury of our past; and it alone can keep our ideals as a nation fresh in our minds. Aren't we already regarded by the outside world as British? So people tell me who have travelled. No foreigner who hears us talking Irish can call us British."

"Do you hate England so much?" asked Mary, somewhat astonished by such vigorous eloquence in a nursery governess.

"I do not hate England exactly," Peggy replied, "I've no feeling whatever against individual English

people, though I cannot say I like the superior, condescending manner any of them I've come across generally seem to have. But I hate England—the thing we call England. I don't know whether it is the English Government or the English people in the mass, or what it is. I hate the England which is for ever doing everything it can to impose on us its own ideas of what's good for us. Because a thing's English it is therefore the best there is! That's the attitude I hate. If we were tied up to Germany or France I daresay I'd feel just the same antagonism to them, if they treated us in the same way. But as 'tis England we're tied to against our will, 'tis England I dislike and want to get rid of."

"We'll never be able to get rid of England, I'm afraid," Mary objected, "so we might as well make the best of her."

"Oh, I daresay we may never get rid of England as a political master—although empires never last for ever. But we can get rid of England's influence over us without overthrowing her political power, much as I'd like to see that crumble, too."

"You mean that an Irish-speaking Ireland means a free Ireland, because it means an intellectually free Ireland," said Con.

"Exactly," said Peggy, "but indeed Miss Lalor must think I'm a fanatic. I believe I never talked so much in all my life before."

"I confess you've almost made me wonder was I right to give up learning Irish," said Mary.

"Why not start a Gaelic League Branch in Killeely," said Con suddenly.

"I'm afraid I couldn't help much," said Peggy, "I'm very much tied down here."

"Would you help?" Con asked Mary. "I know

you're a great organizer from all I hear about you on the committee of the co-operative society."

"Oh! nonsense," said Mary, "a thing like that only wants a little work to keep it together; once it's started it practically runs itself. Everybody's with us now. I'm no organizer."

"Well, you must become one," said Con, "we'll make plans on the way back."

"I must go for the children," said Peggy.

They went out. On the stairs Con succeeded in exchanging a few hasty, whispered words with her.

"You were in grand form this evening," he said, "I never admired you so much. But I wish I could get you to myself a bit now and then. I saw as much of you at Keownstown, almost, as I do here."

"That's not my fault," she replied wistfully. "Walk back with me after Mass on Sunday, part of the way, then, and we'll chance what people will say. If we meet out at the cross and go over the fields we'll hardly meet a soul."

"Indeed I will," said Con

CHAPTER XII

No simpler building could be found than Kildeely chapel, and no ceremony more simply performed than the Mass said therein at eleven o'clock on every Sunday and Holy Day morning.

Kildeely parish was served by two priests, who, in accordance with universal custom, took turns to officiate in the two churches within the parish.

A month or so after the visit of Con and Mary to Gortroe it fell to Father Hehir to say Mass in the parish church, while Father Mulryan had to cover a long and hilly journey to a place off the Keownstown road, a mile or two above Rivervale: Barnagweeha Chapel it was called, and it well merited its name, so that compassionate parishioners pitied the old priest whenever his turn came to drive the six miles to the bleak mountainy chapel, and he fasting, the poor man.

It was a warm enough morning, for the spring was well advanced, and Con would have strolled leisurely towards Kildeely as he finished his after-breakfast pipe if this had been an ordinary Sunday morning. He did indeed try to do so, but his pace soon quickened in keeping with the agitation of his mind; his pipe became hot and gurgling, so that he knocked it out against a stone in disgust.

In actual fact no dire calamity threatened him, nor had any catastrophe occurred to upset his equanimity. Yet he was more miserable than a conscientious bankrupt; more terrified than a prisoner condemned

to die at dawn. And this all arose from the simple and unimportant fact that he had been asked by Father Hehir and Mary Lalor to add a word to what they would say to the people after Mass, on the subject of starting a Gaelic League Branch. In other words, Con had agreed to make a public speech—or so it seemed to him, notwithstanding their assurances that he need only say a dozen sentences.

“You are a person whom the people regard as a severely practical man,” Mary had said to him when she and Father Hehir had broached the project; “they look on you as a man with a mind unwarped by idealism, whose whole interest lies in reclaiming Rathcarrig. I’m a girl and a well-known crank. ‘’Tis a new craze of hers,’ they’ll say of me, especially as it is only lately I became keen on Irish. Father Hehir is too well-known as an enthusiast already; especially as an enthusiast for lost causes. So we want you too: just a few words to show that we have a solid man with us.”

It was Peggy who really carried the day with him, though he had not a chance to consult her. He knew well enough that she would urge him to help in any way he could, and so, half protesting, he agreed.

And now he was walking to eleven o’clock Mass in a state of feverish nervousness, quite unjustified by the paltry effort he was called upon to make. But to him it was an ordeal, magnified to ridiculous proportions by the anticipation of his imagination. He reached the little town before the bell began to summon the people to Mass, and, instead of as usual stopping to chat with some loungee on the green, or dropping into the post office for his letters and a few minutes conversation with the postmistress, he barely passed the time of day with the groups of people who stood here

and there awaiting the bell, but walked straight on to the church and went in to his customary seat. The building was almost empty, but a few of the older men and women were already on their knees saying their prayers with that devotional abstraction which only the generation which can remember the Famine seems to possess. Con knelt down and tried to concentrate his mind. But it was not under his control, and he soon rose from his knees and leaned back in the corner of his seat, looking around him absent-mindedly, as he repeated to himself, for the hundredth time, the words he intended to use from the steps outside—only an hour hence.

He saw young Jemmy MacDwyer come through the sacristy door. While part of his mind still fussed about the coming meeting another part idly contemplated the rough boy lighting the tall candles on the altar. He compared his clumsy boots, his awkward manner of genuflecting, and the casual way in which he threw away the match he had struck on the seat of his trousers, with the spotless cleanliness and carefully trained actions of the altar-boys in some of the churches he used to attend in Dublin. For the first time the garishness of this country chapel struck him; the cheap woodwork, the tawdry statues and half-cleaned brass on the altar. And then as the bell rang and the people began to stream in, the rabble of whispering, jostling small boys pushing into the front pews distracted him again. What a strange mixture of simple piety and thoughtless irreverence is a country congregation, he thought, as Father Hehir came on to the altar steps followed by his three imps of acolytes.

Father Hehir was a swift reader of prayers. It was not long before he had reached the Epistle, and a few minutes later they were all standing to hear the Gospel

of the day. When the priest laid his Testament upon the altar the congregation again resumed their seats to hear the announcements of the day, and then, if there was to be one, the sermon.

Con's heart bumped against his ribs as he listened to Father Hehir's first words :

"There will be a meeting held immediately after Mass at the gate of the church for the purpose of instituting in this parish a branch of the Gaelic League. I am sorry to say that I have just received word from the organizer that he is unable to be here, but two of our most respected parishioners will address you, and I will myself have a few words to say, too. You know my views well enough, for I have told you in this very place, on more than one Saint Patrick's Day, of my firm belief in the movement we hope to inaugurate in Kiltelly to-day. So I will not delay you now."

He paused a few moments before he began his sermon :

"In the Gospel which I am after reading to you, my dear brethren, you heard these words : 'He that loveth Me not keepeth not My words.' God's Word, as expressed in the commandments, has been taught to you from your infancy : in religious instruction at school ; in the instruction you received when being prepared for confirmation ; and from this altar in the instruction of the day as expounded by the priest from time to time. Those who love God keep His commandments. But these commandments must be read in the light of the modern world in which we live. It is not enough to keep them in the letter.

"Now, I say to you, my dear brethren, in all humility, for though I am the servant of God, I am but an erring man like yourselves : reflect upon the spirit of the commandments. Did it ever enter your

minds, for instance, that there are faults common in a small country town like ours which constitute a violation of the spirit of the commandments, even though they may not at first sight appear to be contrary to the declared Word of God or to the law of the Church.

“ Indeed, as I speak, this moment an example of what I mean strikes me. I see a number of you young men crowding together there at the door—even outside it, I believe. Yet there is plenty of room in the church—actually an empty seat here near the front. You may be observing the letter of the obligation to hear Mass, but you are far from exhibiting the proper spirit. This practice is shamefully irreverent, for it shows a want of respect for God’s Church, and so for God Himself. How can you satisfy your consciences when you remember that you actually show greater signs of deference—only outwardly, I know, but even so—towards, let us say, the people who happen to live in big houses than you do to the Blessed Sacrament. For you touch your hats obsequiously to them—some of you go out of your way to lick the ground before them—but you do not take the trouble to look for a seat here like decent people, but lounge around the doorway. Mind you, don’t go away with the idea that I am rebuking you for treating your Protestant neighbours with respect. Far from it. I am glad to see you treat Canon McNabb and the rest of them with proper courtesy. What I object to is the servile way some people in this parish conduct themselves. A person can behave with decent manners and still hold himself up in an independent and manly way.

“ The faults I speak of—of which this servility is one—are faults of character rather than of conduct. I would be the last to deny that these faults of character of ours arose very largely from our past,

from our history as a downtrodden people. Still and all, though politically we are not free, we cannot justify our shortcomings by merely pointing to the origin of them. We must make an attempt also to correct them.

“Slavishness is one; and all these deplorable characteristics of ours are, every one of them, the marks of the slave.

“Our enemies taunt us with ‘the moral cowardice of the Roman Catholic Irish.’ I thank God there is less truth in their taunt than used be the case. But there is still a marked lack of moral courage in the people, as there is still great physical courage in them. We are in no need of more of the courage which enables a man to be fearless in hurling, in riding, or in fighting, if it comes his way. What we want is courage to tell the truth and scorn the consequences, to do the right and fair thing no matter what people may say of us. He that loveth God keepeth His commandments in the spirit as well as in the letter.

“The slave fawns upon his master, fearing the lash, and seeking to have his chains lightened. Are not those men slaves in mind who spread lying reports abroad, and thereby injure their fellows. ‘Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.’ That is an actual commandment. ‘Ah, but I meant no harm,’ people say when they have a little twist given to a story. But it is harm, all the same, to make any statement about another man or woman which you do not know to be true, even if you don’t know it to be untrue: it may bring sorrow upon a home, and it will assuredly bring sorrow to God—and to love and please God should be the aim of our lives.

“I will not say very much upon this subject. As I told you a few minutes ago I will have occasion to speak again on another matter after Mass. I have, I

think, already given you something to think about. If I were to add anything I might remind you—a thing the behaviour of some people in this parish would make me think you do not realize—that the animals of the field have feelings, at least physical feelings, like yourselves. I tell you with all earnestness that the man who ill treats his horse or ass, leaving them unshod, working them with sore breasts or backs, or beating them unnecessarily, aye, and the thoughtless boys who unmercifully destroy the nests of harmless birds in springtime, these, too, are guilty of wounding God and breaking the spirit of His Word.

“Remember, then, the advice not only of your priest but of a man who is one of yourselves as well : be reverent in your dealings with God ; be straightforward and truthful in your dealings with men ; and be kind in your dealings with animals. Do this, and you will have gone a long way towards keeping God’s commandments both in the spirit and in the letter of the law.”

Con admired the short, straightforward manner of the little discourse as much as he respected the speaker for his obvious sincerity and fearlessness. All thought of the superiority of city churches to this bleak country chapel left him ; he wondered rather had he ever heard a sermon so much to the point in Dublin, or had he ever been one of a congregation who listened so intently to any ordinary secular preacher there. But he could have wished that Father Hehir had omitted his sermon altogether on this occasion, for every minute of it prolonged the agony of his apprehension. At last, however, it was over ; the words *ite missa est* were pronounced ; and then with the relief of utter despair he realized that the prayers after Mass were said and that the people were beginning to move down the aisle,

CHAPTER XIII

Outside he met Mary Lalor. He looked about for Peggy, but she was not to be seen. Mary seemed quite at her ease and showed no signs of anything unusual being toward.

"What a pity Peadar couldn't come," she said. "We'll have to say more than we had intended." Con gasped inwardly. "Father Tom will make a good substitute for him, but the people like to hear an outsider. It gives them a feeling that the business in hand is of more consequence than if only their own are there to talk to them."

"I'm afraid they're beginning to go home," said Con, pointing to some people who had already begun to walk away.

"Oh! 'tis only Jack Hanvy and his like," she said, "they're no loss; and we can hardly expect the married women and the children to remain."

They talked for a few minutes till Con could restrain his impatience no longer. "I'm sure I'll make a mess of this," he said. "I never made a speech before and I'm in a miserable state of funk."

"Oh, you needn't make a speech," Mary reassured him, "just tell them why you are a Gaelic Leaguer."

"I wish Father Hehir would hurry over his breakfast, anyway," said Con, who was thinking that he could hardly tell the people of Kiltelly how he became a Gaelic Leaguer.

Just then the priest came towards them, still wearing

his soutane ; and, seeing him, the people began to gather around the steps of the chapel gates.

He held up his hand for silence. He spoke first a few sentences in rather halting Irish ; then he turned to English.

“ ’Tis not so long since the language I am after speaking like a foreigner, and which most of you here cannot speak at all, was the natural speech of the people of all Ireland, and I believe a few of our own old people here had it in their youth, though ’tis so long ago that they can now hardly frame their lips to utter the sweet Gaelic of their childhood. That, then, is my first reason for calling upon you to support the Gaelic League ; learn your own language.

“ A nation deprived of its language, a nation which has adopted the language of its conqueror, is a nation sick unto death. *Gan tír gan teanga*, says the old saying. Will you hasten the death of your own nation ? There was a day when men, aye, and women too, in Ireland would give their lives for their country.

“ Men and women of Killeely, we have fallen upon evil times, and the evils we have to contend with are the evils of doing nothing for Ireland and caring nothing for Ireland. Will you let our nation die without striking a blow to save her ? Will you watch her life-blood flowing away without lifting a hand to stop it ? (‘ No, no. ’) It is not with pikes or guns I urge you to fight for her. It is by hard work : not by hard work of your bodies and the sweat of your brows, but by determination and perseverance to save the spirit of Ireland. My friends, that spirit is encased in the language. It is the storehouse of our history and traditions ; it is above all the anchor of our Faith. Then learn it, learn it, learn it, and let each one among you say to himself or to herself : ‘ I do it in the name of Ireland, for only by such indi-

vidual effort can my Motherland be saved from extinction.' ”

He broke off, and the people, who had listened almost without a sound, save for an occasional shout of approval, now burst into a cheer. Their emotions were easily stirred, and no one knew better than Father Hehir how to move them to enthusiasm.

Poor Con, quaking in the background, was wondering how many of the points he had intended to make would have been already touched on either by Father Hehir or Mary before his turn came. His tongue was dry in his mouth as he contemplated this added disconcertion. Father Hehir continued his speech in a different vein. He spoke in a matter-of-fact voice, in strong contrast to the passion with which he poured forth his opening sentences. He now set himself to explain to the crowd the nature and constitution of the Gaelic League, the work it had done hitherto and what it hoped to accomplish in the future ; and finally how a local branch should be formed and what its activities would be. As he passed from point to point and came at length to deal with the local aspect of the work, he became, as it appeared unconsciously, once more an eloquent advocate. In a peroration even more fervent than his opening words, he appealed to his hearers not to be laggards, but to be in the vanguard of the movement for the spiritual reconquest of their land. “ But,” he added, “ let us have no faint hearts in our ranks. Better only ten brave and zealous workers, nay better no one at all, than a crowd of lukewarm patriots, flocking to the standard at the first call, from curiosity or for fear of what will be said of them if they stay away ; first excuses for absence, then no excuses, then perhaps open scoffing at the few who will remain. I tell you if you are not

prepared to forego your usual amusements—though God knows they are meagre enough—if you are not prepared to give up your evenings, if you cannot start with a fixed determination to continue, then do not join us : let only those who feel they are with us, heart and soul, follow me to the schoolroom, when this meeting is over, to enrol themselves members of the Killeely branch of the Gaelic League.”

Father Hehir turned aside, and Mary took his place on the steps. Her speech was quite simple and free from any trace of rhetoric, yet delivered clearly and without hesitation. It was punctuated by frequent friendly interjections from the crowd, “Up, the Irish,” “Go on, Miss Mary,” “’Tis true for her, so it is,” and so on. She spoke for ten minutes, and during this period Con’s last shreds of confidence deserted him, for she seemed to have said almost everything which was contained in the carefully prepared speech, so arduously committed to memory by him overnight.

Nevertheless, when she had finished he stepped forward without a tremor. He was like one anaesthetized. He had no idea what he would say, yet the nervousness which had tormented him so persistently, even when he was fortified by words carefully learnt by heart, now gave place to a feeling almost of elation. He began as confidently as a practised speaker, though he took a few moments to get accustomed to the sound of his own voice. He listened to it with a kind of second consciousness, which, even as he was forming quite intelligible sentences in another part of his mind, actually reflected that the voice, though his own, seemed like the voice of a stranger. Afterwards he told Mary that he could remember this sensation vividly, while he had no recollection whatever of what

words he had actually been using, and only the vaguest memory of their general import.

Though he had never spoken in public before, his instinct told him to fix his gaze on some object and to speak to that directly. His eye fell upon a small, middle-aged farmer, red-bearded and wizened. His hard hat, slightly crumpled collar, and faded tie lived ever after with Con as one of his most vivid memories. As long as he kept his eyes fixed on this man, the spell which was on him, and which enabled him to continue speaking, remained. But as he gathered confidence and began to use his brain to collect and marshal his ideas he let his eye wander over the crowd. He caught a glimpse of Hanvy on the outskirts of the gathering, leaning against the wall and smiling sardonically. He began to stumble and labour for words to express his meaning. With an effort, he pulled himself together and looked away from Hanvy. He sought to find again the red beard and puce tie. He scanned the upturned faces in vain and then he stopped dead. He saw looking up at him a face of one who he knew at once was more anxious for his success than he was himself; he was looking straight at Peggy Folane. The seconds passed until he felt that at least several minutes went by. The people began to shift their positions. Some nudged one another and giggled. Some seemed unable to comprehend what had happened. A few raised a faint cheer of encouragement. Suddenly he caught sight of the little farmer. His hat was the sail on the horizon, coming to rescue the drowning shipwrecked crew clinging desperately to their raft. The hat saved him. He opened his mouth again, and instantly every person in the crowd was all attention; the hiatus had given the speaker an interest he had not possessed before.

Con adopted the most matter-of-fact tone he could command.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "a curious thing happened me. My mind became a blank. I forgot suddenly what I was saying. I forget still. Ah, I have it now . . ." and he went on. He dared not look at Peggy again, but once he recovered the thread of his speech he felt her presence a help, not an embarrassment, and, if he did not come up to Father Tom as an orator and failed to attain the distinctness of speech of Mary Lalor, at least he was able to finish without disgracing himself or bringing ridicule upon the cause he was supporting.

Father Hehir then said a few words more, telling those of the people who wished to join the branch to go to the schoolhouse, and again warning them that no one was wanted who was not wholeheartedly with them.

The farmers and their families, almost without a single exception, then went home, quite unmoved by what they had heard; they regarded the whole thing as an amusing incident, a mere episode to be classed with a *cause célèbre* at the Petty Sessions or a travelling circus, food for talk at the fireside for a week or two, and then forgotten. Not one of them, however much he cheered at the time, took Father Hehir's impassioned appeal as a serious call on their patriotism. Two farmers' sons, however, remained behind. With one of them, a quiet, earnest country boy who eventually succeeded in the task he set himself, we are not concerned. The other was Peter Paul Vahey.

Peter Paul was the last man in the parish anyone would have expected to join the Gaelic League, for in the year 1907 it had made little progress in the remote English-speaking districts and was not yet

fashionable even in the large towns. Peter Paul was much more in keeping with the private bar of Henry Hcctor's establishment, in company with the select personages who frequented it, than with a Gaelic class. Not only his known tastes and habits but even his appearance were such as to cause shrugged shoulders, and half surprised, half suspicious glances among his new associates. Yet there had been little opportunity in the parish hitherto of separating the sheep from the goats : the Land League days were but a memory ; the Parnell split was not calculated to bring out the best in the people ; and the day when the Irish-Ireland spirit was to sweep triumphantly over the countryside was still nearly half-a-score of years away. So the twenty or so men and women who stood at the school-house door, waiting for Jemmy MacDwyer to come with the forgotten key, looked somewhat askance at Peter Paul Vahey, though the general sentiment expressed in undertones was that he must have been misjudged hitherto, and deserved the more praise for joining them now.

"What we require first," said Father Hehir, when they had gained an entrance, "is an energetic secretary ; it would be well to have someone with some Irish."

"We're all in the same boat there," said Peter Paul.

"Miss Folane has Irish," said one.

"Where is she at all ?" asked another.

Mary struck in : "I hardly think Miss Folane could act as secretary and she a governess three miles from here. If you like I'll act as secretary, at first anyway."

A voice was heard from the doorway. "There's no pay attached to the job, so there'll not be many looking for it."

It was Hanvy, half in the room, half outside, who

had gravitated towards the gathering since they had entered the schoolhouse.

Mary was elected by acclamation. No one objected to the proceedings being somewhat irregular, though the election was out of order, inasmuch as there were at the time actually no members to elect her. The secretary's first duty, however, was to take the names of those present, all of whom were anxious to join.

"Now," said Father Hehir, when the names had been secured, "what about you, Jack Hanvy at the door there?"

"Is it a secretary you want, Father?" he said innocently.

"Jack's too busy a man for that," said someone.

"I own my time is fully occupied," Hanvy replied importantly. He had a high-class way of speaking, and was fond of long words. The people of the place delighted to hear him talk, for he was somewhat of a butt, though secretly feared, especially when any bad work was going on in the district, or when he was drinking more heavily than usual.

"His elbow does be tired working," was heard *sotto voce*, and a laugh went up.

"Will you join the League?" asked Father Tom from the chair.

"I must have due time for consideration, Father," he replied. The titter which followed this remark evidently annoyed the chairman.

"Come in if you wish to join or go out and shut the door if you do not," he said severely.

"I beg your pardon, Father, I thought you were anxious to convert people to your way of thinking. This is coercion."

"In or out, Jack."

"Well, I fear it must be out, ladies and gentlemen,"

said Hanvy, bowing and shutting the door with great precision. It was hard to get the better of Hanvy, as Con knew well; whenever Con attacked him for idling, unpunctuality, or leaving tools about, Jack was always ready with a perfect impromptu excuse, so barefaced and plausible as to dumbfound him. There was nothing for Hanvy, Con had discovered, but "Billingsgate," copious and unadulterated. Otherwise that astute gentleman would always go away about his work unrepentant and with an incomprehensible smile on his face, half friendly, half derisive.

The business was soon over and the members dispersed. Con went to Kilteely House to lunch, to talk over with Mary plans for the work they had undertaken. He felt elated, but he knew that it was the reaction after the miserable suspense of waiting to speak at the meeting. He did not ascribe any part of it to the presence of the very charming girl at his side as they walked up the avenue to her house. But for once, though she had played an important part in the events of his morning only known to himself, the memory of Peggy was dim and the charm of his companion very poignant.

CHAPTER XIV

Kilteely can be sure of its fifty inches of rain in the year. Often the spring and sometimes the summer are dry ; but if they are, November and December, and January too, will make up the deficiency in the annual rainfall with unfailing persistence. Rain, almost without intermission, is regarded as inevitable during those months ; the only hope of making any appreciable progress with out-of-door work lies in the chance that the fine intervals may occur in the day time and not at night. Often during the wet winter months Con would be at his wits' end to find employment day after day for his men, whom he did not care to send home idle, and whom he could not condemn to a perpetual state of saturation. At such times, when, as he undressed, he saw through his bedroom window the myriad points of starlight sparkling in the winter sky, he would think helplessly of all the work that might be done if the nights were only days and the days nights, for he forgot that such things average themselves out over a sufficiently long period of time, and that if his wishes came true they would be but improving the conditions of one year at the expense of another.

It was during one such unfortunate vein of weather that he made his way on a pouring Sunday afternoon to Kilteely House. The day was too wet to face the walk to Gortroe, and feeling disinclined to spend the whole day at home he had decided to visit the Lalors.

It was still raining when he reached the big, grey house, though a faint lightening in the clouds to westward indicated that once more a drenching day would be followed by a fine night.

As he expected, both Mary and her mother were at home. He would not have risked a *tête-a-tête* with the old lady, for, though she was hospitality itself, Con had never been able to penetrate the old-fashioned mould of her mind or to find any interest in common with her. She was pleasant and friendly towards him whenever they met, but she belonged to a generation Con did not know or understand, and while his interests lay in the twentieth century, with its national movements and its new conception of the duties of landed proprietors, hers still lay in the County Galway of her girlhood, in the talk of the hunting-field, and the memories of a Dublin Season not yet shorn of all its former gaiety and importance.

Though the hand of Mary was to be seen in little touches here and there—a bunch of yellow jessamine in a pot in the hall or a bookshelf filled with modern books—it was her mother's influence which pervaded the house. The drawingroom into which Con was shown was large and high-ceilinged, and appeared to have been once furnished with eighteenth century taste. But the Victorian era had entered into possession with Mrs. Lalor, and the old tables and chairs and presses had one by one given place to the imported atrocities of a later date. The spirit of a new age had cast out from the drawingroom of Kildeely House all that was best in the times which went before it, as in the great commercial nations modern progress banishes the old pastoral beauty of its woods and fields to a few districts remote and far from the haunts of the multitude.

"Tea is just coming in," said Mary, when Con had seated himself. "It is very early yet, but, like everyone else, we overeat on Sundays, especially on wet Sundays."

"Mary is given to making ridiculously inaccurate statements," said Mrs. Lalor.

Con laughed and said: "I never take afternoon tea at all as a rule: I have an early supper as soon as work is finished and don't waste time going in to tea. But I am going to indulge in excess to-day. I know how jolly good your cakes are."

"I didn't stir out of the house to-day," Mary remarked.

"She said the downpour was sufficient excuse for missing Mass," the old lady explained. "Do you think that is justifiable, Mr. O'Hickie?"

"Really, I don't know," Con replied. "I would imagine it was a very good reason. We had Father Mulryan to-day and I thought he'd never finish. Half the people were wet through, but he didn't seem to think of that."

"Bridget was grumbling about him when she came back," said Mary. "She was so late that dinner was half-an-hour behind time."

"My old Lally never goes on his Sundays: she says we are over three miles from the chapel," said Con with a laugh.

"English miles are short, but even Lally couldn't make three miles out of less than one and a half," was Mary's comment.

"I hear the old dame is a great character," Mrs. Lalor remarked. "Look," she added, "there is a break in the clouds: it will soon clear."

"'Tis hardly raining at all now," said Mary. "I'll put on my boots. Are you game for a walk up the mountain, Mr. O'Hickie?"

"Indeed I am," replied Con.

When she returned to the drawingroom a few minutes later Mary was wearing a rough tweed coat and skirt and strong boots.

Con rose to go out with her, but he had hardly taken his leave of Mrs. Lalor when the parlourmaid entered the room.

"Old Barty MacCormack is here, Miss Mary. He says he wants to speak to you."

Mary asked where he was to be found.

"He's within in the back hall, Miss; I didn't know where to leave him."

"Well, bring him out to the front door, Katie. Come on, Mr. O'Hickie. If you're with me I'll find it easier to get finished with him, whatever he wants."

They entered the hall, and at the same moment a very old man appeared at another door.

"Well, Barty," said Mary. "I'm just going out. What do you want me to do?"

"I hope you're well, Miss Mary," he replied, "and the Mistress too, I hope she's well, 'Tis a bad day, thank God, A terrible lot of rain we're after getting."

"That's right, Barty: we're all well here, thanks. Now, tell me, as I'm in a hurry, what brought you here to see me?"

The old man apparently realized that further preliminary conversation would not be permitted, so half reluctantly he lowered his voice to a confidential undertone and began:

"Whisper now, till I tell you, Miss Mary. I've a little matter here that's not quite in me line." He stopped as if he could not bring himself to go on.

"Well, what is it, Barty?" Mary asked encouragingly.

"'Tis some papers, Miss," he said at last, He

plunged his old, skinny hand into a pocket deep in the recesses of his frieze coat.

"'Tis the way I have to put me name to them," he explained. "I haven't an overage of scholarship, you understand, and I thought maybe you'd look them over for me."

"They're simple enough," said Mary, glancing over the sheets the old man had handed to her. "Look, you have to sign here—and here—in two places."

The old farmer placed his black hat on the floor before he sat down heavily on the chair at the writing table. Con observed the slow and shaky progress of the old man's hand as he wrote his name, and the heavy breathing which testified to his distress at his task, and he wondered if Barty MacCormack had once been a good writer long ago when he was a schoolboy, whether he had simply lost the art of writing through disuse, just as he himself had already forgotten his Euclid and his algebra.

Their talk as they set out on their walk was of old MacCormack and his semi-illiteracy, and of the many queer, almost patriarchal, duties which Mary was called upon to perform by reason of her popularity with the people and of their trust in her.

There was no lack of choice before them for their walk, but they instinctively took the way through the town, and on towards the mountain above Rathcarrig. They soon found a bohireen, more watercourse than roadway, with its mountain torrent leaping down after the heavy rains, now in a deep, swirling stream beside the road, and now spread out in a sheet of water over the full breadth of the lane. They decided to turn aside, and they crossed one of the loosely-built low walls which bounded the bohireen and jumped into the field.

There was little cultivation in that region. The steeply sloping fields, divided from each other by an interminable succession of low stone walls, were covered, some thickly, some sparsely, with furze bushes—which in their season made the whole hillside a blaze of golden colour. Everywhere there remained the evidence of bygone industry ; the very walls were built of stones picked off the tillage fields, which now grew nothing but poor mossy grass, and the memory of those days was kept alive by the permanent undulations which remained in the land, telling their tale of potato drills sown in '47 and left undug by the famine-stricken population. They had remained untouched since that ill-fated autumn. Time had levelled those sterile ridges somewhat, and nature had hidden them with a covering of moss and grass. But with a low sun shining in the west every bygone drill and ridge seemed to rise out of the ground once more as the horizontal rays of the sun threw each into relief, its long, dark shadow beside it.

The fields were too steep to be sodden with the wet, and they climbed upwards until they came to a high bank which for the moment stopped their progress. Turning round they hardly knew which way to look. To the east the great banks of clouds from which the downpour had been falling during the day hung like a soft lavender pall low down on the mountains beyond the river. A long, blue-green streak of sky cut the dense greyness in half, and gave to the little lakes below them and to the water of the river a colour of grey lavender a shade more dusky than the masses of cloud beyond. Alban's ivy-covered ruin stood out, a small but clearly defined outline on the edge of Glenowan bog. And in the west the setting sun drew a wonderful rose-pink light upon the broken clouds,

and made a striking contrast to the sombre splendour of the eastern sky.

"My God," exclaimed Con, "that's glorious. We don't half realize the beauty of the place we live in."

Mary assented. "'Tis the sort of sky," she said after a moment, "that sets me speculating. Of course, everybody more or less often must be conscious of the littleness of all our world. You've only to look into those clouds to feel it. But for all that at times like this I nearly always feel driven in on myself, and I wonder what am I doing and what am I for."

"Well, yes," said Con doubtfully. "But it's the majestic beauty of it affects me most. I don't think of myself at all. Perhaps my sense of my own littleness is even greater than yours."

"No. It's just that you've less reason to think about yourself," she replied. "You have a career mapped out for yourself; I haven't."

"Oh, what nonsense," said Con. "Why, I've nothing mapped out for myself at all, and as a matter of fact we have before us absolutely identical careers, I should think, if we stick to what we are doing."

"No, that's just where you're wrong. I wonder how many men and women have argued out this same point before. You forget marriage. Marriage is much more a career to a woman than to a man."

"I daresay. But in your case at least you could continue your career, as we are calling it, even if you did get married."

"That depends on the man, of course. Do you know, - Con," she said, unconsciously using his Christian name as the subject of their conversation became more intimate, "I dread marriage."

"Why!" exclaimed Con, looking quickly at his

companion, and with something like a pang in his heart. "You're not engaged, are you?"

"Oh no, of course not, but one thinks of possibilities. Marriage means such a lot to a girl."

"Yes, I suppose it does: but why do you dread it?"

"I don't like the idea of the intimacy it involves."

"Oh," said Con easily, "that's because you've never felt what it's like to be in love."

"Perhaps," she replied. "I doubt if I ever will. Still, if I do itself, I dread it. But I feel it is a duty for a woman; at least motherhood is."

"Oh," was all Con trusted himself to say.

"Yes," Mary continued, as if thinking aloud rather than talking to a young man on a mountain-side, "the funny part of it is that I don't even feel an exact longing to be a mother, and yet the thought of not ever being one seems to leave the future so barren."

"Lots of women are mothers without being married," said Con, without taking much thought as to what he said. Mary's tone, if not her words, seemed to keep their talk on an impersonal level.

"Why did you say that?" she asked.

"I don't know really," he replied. "You're not offended, are you?"

"No," she said. "But I would have been if you'd said it in a different tone."

"I'm glad my tone did not belie the inoffensiveness of my state of mind," said Con. He looked at her again as she leaned against the grassy bank watching the sun disappearing behind the Clare hills. Somehow he began to think that this impersonal, bloodless sort of talk was rather ridiculous between himself and a pretty girl.

"I know very little about men really," she went on

in the same voice, "although of course I came across any amount of them in Dublin."

"If you did, then why do you know nothing of them?" said Con, now almost irritated. "I'm sure a pretty girl like you couldn't stay long in a city without having them all around you."

Mary muttered something which did not amount to a reply.

"You *are* pretty, you know," Con continued.

"Um," said Mary.

"In fact, you're absolutely beautiful," he exclaimed with sudden fervour.

"Rot, Con, shut up," she said, noticing with apparent surprise that his face did not wear the same self-possessed and calm expression as her own. "I can't touch on an interesting subject but you seem to change completely from the casual friendly fellow I know you as."

"All right," said Con, sobered in a moment by her manner. "I'll resume my proper *rôle* if you'll agree to continue the conversation."

"Agreed," she said. "But, look, the sun has gone down now and the whole sky is changed. The spell is broken, as it were, for this day. Let's go home,"

CHAPTER XV

The months soon lengthened into years, and Con settled down to his new life so naturally that he almost forgot that he had ever been doing anything else but working on Rathcarrig farm. After three or four years Father Hehir, Mary Lalor, and Dick Keane seemed like the friends of a lifetime. There was Peggy, too. Sometimes he thought he was in love with her, at others he felt for her a curious mixture of affection and something which almost amounted to pity : affection for her companionable way of treating him, for the welcome she always gave him when they met ; pity for the lonely, uncongenial life she led at Gortroe, and for which he felt he was not altogether unresponsive. She was very poor, of course, and could not afford to make the most of her good looks. He could not hide from himself that he was in love with her when she looked as she had looked that night at Keownstown ; but he was fond of her in a different way when she was at Gortroe. Peggy Folane the nursery governess and the Peggy Folane with whom he sometimes walked to Gortroe after Mass across the fields were not the same person, and Con's perplexity and inability to understand his own feelings were complicated by his admiration for Mary Lalor, whom he saw more frequently than Peggy. Mary was a free agent, a near neighbour, and connected with the Gaelic League and the co-operative society ; she was herself a farmer. So hardly a week passed but Con

met her once or twice. And Peggy was a nursery governess.

Con's potential love affairs, however, gave him little trouble ; they caused him no sleepless nights or lack of appetite : for his real love was not a woman, but the five hundred acres of land which were his constant thought and care.

He was successful as a farmer, strangely successful for one not brought up from childhood to the life ; though the root of the matter was in him, as he said himself, ancestrally on his father's side and from his Kerry mother's family. He ploughed and reaped and sowed his crops as the seasons came and went. Some things went against him, and in some the results exceeded his expectations, but he had little worry with the land and crops and cattle beyond the anxieties common to every countryman. Sickness, inevitable trial wherever there is a considerable herd of cattle, occasionally kept Con from his bed all night, and sometimes after a fruitless vigil the sick beast died. He had not many cows or ewes, but in its season the lambing cost him many an anxious hour walking around the pen on bleak nights, lantern in hand ; and the supervision of the cows in their turn he would not delegate to Thady Comyn, the herd, though he might well have trusted him, for he was very faithful to his work so long as it did not go outside his appointed sphere. He was a herd only, and was slow to help at other work except at very pressing times at hay and harvest.

Who says a countryman's life is dull ! His recreations may be, but assuredly for three months of the year at least, his daily work is one long round of excitement. The heavens, whose aspect is of interest to the townsman only when his pleasure is afoot, are to the

countryman a mystery to be probed daily, almost hourly. His first thought in the morning is the look of the sun and clouds, the absence or presence of dew, the direction of the wind, his last act before going to bed is to take a look out into the night, where the moon, the wind, and a dozen other intimate indications tell him of the promise of the morrow. There is an exhilaration in this never-ending struggle with the weather. Men who live on the sea know it too, the fisherman more intimately than the mariner, for in modern times few storms can deprive a sailor of his livelihood. No sport can equal the great game of chance and skill and judgment combined which every farmer plays from the day he cuts the first swath of his earliest meadow to the autumn evening when his last sheaf of oats is safely stacked in the field or haggard ; no race can compare with the race against time when a dozen good men are together in a field of hay, rain threatening, and every moment another sop safe from the impending downpour. Oh, the joy of tying down the last cock as the first drops fall ; the heartburnings if by chance some is yet to be done and has to be left, maybe until it is musty and discoloured before another fine day comes. West of the Shannon rain plays perhaps a more important part in the daily lives of the people than anywhere in the world.

Con awoke one July morning about five o'clock. The sun was already shining with midday strength into his room, no longer the general living and sleeping room he had at first occupied on the ground floor, but one on the east side into which he had moved as soon as he had been able to get the breaches in the roof made good and the doors and windows of the house repaired. He looked out anxiously and saw, as he had expected, no cloud in the sky : a perfect morning.

Yet there was an ominous stillness in the air and a clearness of atmosphere; objects far away looked near; and the swallows were already beginning to be uncertain of the whereabouts of their aerial food: some flew high, some low. Overnight the moon had shewn a slight halo, and by these signs he knew that there was no time to be lost. No more critical day could come for the length of the year. A glorious ten days of gentle north-east wind and hot sunshine was behind them, and they had been mowing hay day after day, saving it almost as fast as they could cut it. Five Irish acres had been secured the day before, and five more now lay spread out upon the ground wanting only an hour's turning to be in perfect order too.

Con chafed at the fine hours wasted in waiting for the bell to ring. He had shortened the work-hours since the early days when his men had to come in, in some cases several miles, and that after breakfast, at seven o'clock. Now he could have wished that work began at six o'clock rather than at seven-thirty. for this was the sort of morning when there was no dew on the ground to forbid an early start. When at length the appointed time arrived he was already at the yard gate, a horse tackled to the car, and forks and rakes ready. He walked up and down, grumbling at his enforced idleness, and cursing the imperturbable Spellissey for the slowness of his watch. Spellissey did not mend matters by his commonsense remarks as to watches or by his unscientific optimism about the still fine weather. One by one the men came. When the bell rang all were there except Hanvy, and they set off immediately for the meadow.

Con had none of the true countryman's fatalism. Their deliberate movements, when he himself was in a

fever of activity, exasperated him, and his temper was very bad. When they met Jack Hanvy strolling quite unconcernedly towards them, though he was several minutes behind time, Con's pent-up feelings exploded, and he burst into a torrent of oaths, calling Hanvy all the evil things that came into his mind, which, even when calm, was not devoid of imagination. Hanvy listened to him and said nothing. Then he turned on his heel and walked away again in the direction of his own house.

"'Tis one man less," said Con, somewhat taken aback, but still fuming, "but, by God, he's no loss. We're done with him here," he added.

Perhaps impressed by this scene, and perhaps by the now obvious signs of rain to be seen in the gathering clouds and backing wind, the other men quickened their steps and set to work with a will on the "tramming" of the five acres, which was yet to be done. Con set the pace, forking up pike after pike of hay till the sweat ran off him in streams, and his eyes smarted with the salt that was in them. Pat O'Brien, the ploughman, strove manfully to gather in the hay with his horse fast enough to keep the others working at top speed. Spellissey came at eleven o'clock with jars of porter and buttermilk, blessed relief to all, bringing new energy, even to the "temperate" men. Still the rain held off. Dinner by mutual consent was postponed, and later swallowed in a moment from tin cans and paper parcels brought to the field by women and children.

For all their efforts a drizzle, heralding a continuous downpour to come, began before they had more than four of the five acres safe. With redoubled energy they set themselves to make cocks of what remained. Con shouted his instructions as he worked, and the

men ran at their task. At length no more could be done, and, saturated with hot sweat and cold rain, all hastened to find their discarded coats and hats and waistcoats.

Con had had enough hurry for one day, and he made no haste as he walked towards the place where he had left his coat. He was wet through, but he cared nothing for that. It was a simple matter to go home and change, and he was delighted with all that had been accomplished, and with the way in which his men had proved equal to an emergency. He called a word of appreciation, and sent them home, saying that they had done enough for one day and had better get a change of clothes. He counted the forks and rakes into the car, saw Pat O'Brien start for the yard, and then he realized how wet he was, and how unpleasant it is when a cold, clammy shirt clings to a body but recently heated by intense exertion.

He quickened his steps in the wake of Pat O'Brien. He was about halfway home when he saw coming towards him a figure, at first vaguely familiar, which resolved itself into that of Peter Paul Vahey, the somewhat incongruous and not very enthusiastic member of the Gaelic League branch.

Peter Paul seldom attended the classes, but he kept up a show of interest in the movement by never missing a *céilidh* and by helping to organize an open-air *feis* and *aeridheacht* each summer. He was now about thirty years of age, rather fat and florid in complexion, and bearing in his dress and accent unmistakable signs that he had spent some years in America. He had in fact worked for three years in a New York saloon, but his reason for returning to Kiltelly had never been vouchsafed to the people of his native place, try as they would by hints and guesses to solve the riddle he presented to them.

For all his Yankee mannerisms Peter Paul had not discarded some of the time-honoured habits of the country of his birth. Among these was a disinclination to come to the point, no matter under what conditions conversation or interview might be held. Father Hehir once said of him, in a moment of flippancy, that he would assuredly insist on discussing the weather, the price of cattle, and the local gossip of Killeely, before he would condescend to answer the queries of his namesake at the gate of Heaven.

As he listened to him now Con was too easy-going to cut him short and bring him to the real matter which was responsible for the unusual visit. Peter Paul wore a good coat, but he showed no appreciation of Con's soaked condition, beyond waiting till they were beneath the shelter of an oak tree before button-holing him completely.

After some minutes of desultory conversation Con, who was beginning to feel very cold and miserable, at last plucked up enough courage to remind him that he was wet through, and had not yet had his dinner. The fiery mood of the morning had left him, once the excitement of the work in the meadow was over, and Con felt quite incapable of treating Vahey even to a mild repetition of his address to Jack Hanvy.

"Well, I must be going now," said Con, as Peter Paul commenced an anecdote of his own experience of long fasts and wet clothes. "Very pleased to have seen you in Rathcarrig."

"One moment, Mr. O'Hickie, I beg your pardon," said Peter Paul obsequiously. "There is a little matter I'd like to speak to you about."

"Well," said Con in not too friendly a way.

"'Tis like this," began Vahey. "I don't know do you know that Brian Hayes, the secretary of the

co-op., is getting a job in Dublin and that he is likely to leave us. A decent fellow is Brian and always was."

Con interrupted him, fearing a disquisition on the virtues of Brian Hayes. "What about it?" he asked.

"Well, the fact is," replied Peter Paul, "I am thinking of looking for the job myself and I am wishful to know can I rely on your support in the matter."

"Why, I've nothing to do with it," said Con.

"That's where you make a mistake," was the reply.

"You're a member of the society, and I have heard on good authority that you are to be proposed a member of the committee at the next general meeting. God knows you had a right to be on it two years ago when you joined the society. But people in backward places is very slow to put anyone off a committee. Anyway, you're to be on now."

"I can hardly promise support till I know I'm to be on," Con objected.

"You can be sure of being on. I may take it as a promise that you will support my claim?"

"I can hardly say," said Con, shivering. "What qualifications have you?"

"Well, Mr. O'Hickie, you know my power as an organizer." Con gasped at his self-confident effrontery. "I have done good work in the Gaelic League, though I say it as shouldn't. And as to business experience, I had three years in the first commercial city in the world. That should be good enough."

"I really can't promise," said Con, "perhaps I will and perhaps I won't. I'm so wet I really must get home and change."

"A nod is as good as a wink to me," Peter Paul Vahey said to himself as he moved away. "'Twill be

better get him on, anyway. None of the boys would be elected, when it means knocking off another that's been on before. He'll get on flying, with Miss Lalor and the young priest to back him."

Con hurried home, but hasten as he would he could not get warm ; nor did a hot bath and a glass of punch succeed in restoring his circulation.

He went to bed early, feeling very sorry for himself. The next day he went about his work as usual, and by ill luck he got wet through again, a heifer having fallen into a soft dyke, and requiring much ingenuity and carelessness of personal discomfort to extricate her. He woke up the following morning feeling, for the first time since he came to Rathcarrig, really ill.

"Damn it," he said to Spellissey when he came to call him, "I'm a crock. You'd think any child could get wet on a summer's day without getting cold out of it. But I'm feeling that sick I'll not get up till after breakfast. Put the men cutting timber or white-washing. There'll be no work in the meadow while this weather lasts."

Con stayed in bed not only for breakfast but for a very severe illness. Dr. Tomilty called it pleurisy, and was suspicious of its after-effects on one of his lungs, although when once he was out of bed Con thought no more about it.

CHAPTER XVI

Lally, the housekeeper, was not equal to the task of nursing Con, and a nurse was obtained from Limerick. Even nurses are human ; they require some rest, and consequently, when the patient is bad, an assistant has to be found. The girl who nursed Con left no impression upon him, but the fact that she was relieved from time to time by another girl has an important bearing on Con's history : for the other girl was Mary Lalor. She began by calling to inquire for the sick man. Then she lent a hand in some trivial affair. Finally she drifted into a regular position in the régime occasioned by Con's sickness. No objection was raised to this by anyone : it was but the kindly action of a neighbour.

For a while, of course, Con was almost completely indifferent as to who was with him. Nevertheless, even when he was at his worst he felt a certain satisfaction in the way Mary did things for him, and her touch soothed him as he tossed on his bed. After a time he was well enough to take pleasure in her reading, and the new conditions of their intercourse opened up themes of conversation upon which they had never touched in ordinary times. As he lay on his back musing, each day after Mary had left him, he recalled their recent talks, and he began to feel that there was not only a community of interest between them, but also some deeper affinity than that. He had nothing else to occupy his mind, for, when once he had relin-

quished the responsibility of the daily management of Rathcarrig and handed it over for the period of his incarceration to John Spellissey and Tim MacDwyer, he felt strangely little worry about the matters which in normal circumstances were his constant anxiety and care. He let his mind dwell on Mary without making any attempt to distract it. He wondered how he could have been for several years as unobservant as not to notice some things about her which now haunted him: the delicate shape of her ear, for instance, or her voice as she read; and of course there was her touch.

He could think of nothing but Mary as he became convalescent, and he looked forward with ever increasing pleasure to her daily visit.

He almost forgot Peggy; often he quite forgot her for hours, perhaps even days, at a time. But Peggy was not a free agent. She was a nursery governess; and even though Mrs. Keane went over more than once from Gortroe to visit Con, Peggy never had a chance of seeing him at all. Perhaps she would have been as good a nurse as Mary. Peggy, too, had many little things about her which would fix themselves in a sick man's mind. Where was the girl could walk like her, where one with an ankle like hers, and where a dimple equal to hers when she smiled? But a convalescent twenty-six years of age is susceptible to the influence of his immediate surroundings. So it was Mary, not Peggy, who occupied Con's thoughts.

In time the day came when Con left his bedroom, then at last the first walk out of doors.

Mary went with him on that occasion. Con revelled in the sunshine, and drank in the scents of the open air and the sounds of the countryside as only a man can on his release from a jail or a sickroom. "Well,"

THE GAEL

she said, after a time, "I suppose we have come to the end of my days of usefulness here, now that you have reached this stage."

"By no means," said Con, "I'm entirely dependent on you."

"How absurd, you're practically well again."

"Thanks to you if I am," said Con.

"I've done nothing whatever worth mentioning."

"Indeed you have—but I'm not too steady on my legs. What do you say to sitting down on this bank for a while?"

The weather had mended while Con was lying in bed and the ground was dry and hard. They sat down, and Con continued :

"It's only since I was sick I've got to know you."

"Do you think you know me now?"

"I know you inside out, from head to foot," said Con with unexpected vigour.

"It's certainly time I returned to my ordinary occupations," said Mary.

"Why should you return?" Con asked, suddenly.

"Because I'm neglecting the farm and everything I've to look after, and because I see I can be of no further use in Rathcarrig. Your voice alone is enough to tell me you're pretty near well again."

Con turned to her. He was almost trembling with excitement in his weak state, and he spoke with intensity but without self-confidence, "Look here, Mary—I say Mary intentionally, though I don't believe I ever called you by your name except in my dreams. This is no time for make-believe. I feel I have really no right to talk to you in this way while I'm still a crock, but your speaking of cutting off your daily visit drives it out of me." His voice shook and dropped almost to a whisper. "There's one way you could come

back every day . . ." he paused and continued rather lamely, ". . . you would come if we were engaged. Mary, I want you to marry me."

"Oh, Con, why do you ask that. I can't."

"But I love you."

"You don't, Con."

"I do, I do."

"You think you do only."

"Mary, I'm asking you to marry me," he said with a portentous seriousness which would have amused a third person, had one been there.

"You'd better let go my hand, Con," she said, "If you like I'll give you my final answer when you're quite well again. I don't see any reason, I must honestly say, to expect it will be any different then. Do you know, I think we'd better go in now. Indeed, I'm the bad nurse bringing this disturbing element into your convalescence."

The whole incident only occupied a minute or two. For a week or more Con had been picturing this proposal—always with a happy ending leading down long vistas of half-formed thoughts. He had imagined it taking place in the house, in the garden, and at the very spot where he had blurted out his halting words. Romance in prospect; and in retrospect almost a fiasco.

They walked back in silence. Con felt very miserable and he pitied himself greatly; he was seldom nearer to tears since he was a child. Mary accompanied him to the sittingroom. Then she turned to go at once.

"I'll ask you again in a fortnight," said Con.

"All right; good-bye, Con," she meant the friendliness in her tone to express finality more clearly than words could.

Mary had never seemed so perfect to Con as when she left him that evening. His misery, which was real and acute enough at first, lasted for three days. The absence of Mary, on whom he had come to depend for his daily amusement, accentuated his self-com-miseration. But after two days moping he turned in despair to his bookshelf. He took down a book at random : it happened to be the first volume of Lecky, and, greatly to his surprise, he had to acknowledge to himself after two hours' reading that he had become absorbed in the book, and had, for the first time since his proposal to Mary, for a short space entirely forgotten his sadness. From that moment his sadness turned to regret.

At the end of a week Con was almost dreading the day when he should meet Mary again after the fortnight had passed. But before the day came round he already knew instinctively that the question would never be asked a second time, and that Mary would not expect him to ask it. His strength was rapidly returning now, but he felt he would want all he could muster to meet her naturally.

The trial, however, when it came, was light enough. He walked out to Kiltelly to post some arrears of correspondence which he had begun to tackle. At the post office he met Peggy and the Keane children coming out as he was going to the letter-box.

The children greeted him vociferously, hardly remembering that he had been ill at all.

"Why do you never come to play jungle now?" asked Jack.

"I was sick," said Con, smiling his greeting to Peggy.

"It's ages since we saw you," Jack went on reproachfully.

"We'd have forgotten you nearly," said Nancy,

"only that Miss Folane often speaks of you."

"I'm very fond of my Uncle Con," she continued, "and I think Miss Folane is too."

Peggy's blush was delicious, but Con felt embarrassed. He remembered that this was the day on which he would *not* ask Mary the question a second time. But he could not resist watching the blush die away.

"She is incorrigible," said Peggy. "Put Mr. O'Hickie's letters into the box for him," she added to Nancy.

Nancy took them, but found the box too high. She began a delightful game of trying to throw the letters into the aperture. Jack, conscious of his two years superiority of stature, rushed to the rescue of the battered letters.

"I love those two kids," said Peggy, "only for them I don't think I could stand Gortroe. 'Tis very lonely there in a way," she added, a pathetic note in her voice.

"I've been so ill lately I couldn't get over there; in fact, I've been in bed and didn't even go out to Mass," said Con, unconsciously defending himself from the unspoken reproof in his own mind. He had neglected her lately; and she had only gone to Gortroe after consulting him.

They began to speak of his illness, and while they were talking there in the street they were joined by Mary Lalor.

"Good morning, Con," she said, in a tone which told him that she understood him better than he understood himself.

"*Gionnus atá tú, a Mháire*," he replied, airing the Irish they had been studying at Rathcarrig. Peggy's heart jumped as she heard him use Mary's Christian name, and she blushed again somewhat unaccountably.

CHAPTER XVII

By the beginning of September Con was quite well again, and he went about his ordinary work, just as he had done before his unexpected illness. It was a contest with the weather for his corn now, for the saving of the hay was finished.

Hanvy had not returned : otherwise things went on as before, though Con found that, well as the men had worked in his absence, much had been left undone—details rather than essentials—which he would have seen to had he been there. He felt a joy in his restored strength. He promised himself a fortnight at the seaside to complete his recovery, but he could not contemplate going away until he had experienced the ever fresh satisfaction of stacking his corn and leaving it ready for the thresher. Then only would he go away.

Meanwhile the announcement had gone forth that the resignation, foreshadowed by Peter Paul Vahey six or seven weeks before, had been sent in. Brian Hayes had applied for the post in Dublin and obtained it, and he was anxious to leave his job as secretary and manager of the co-operative society as soon as possible. The annual general meeting was fixed for the following Sunday, and his successor would be elected that day by the committee and would enter upon his duties immediately after.

The co-operative society was a large body—some hundred and fifty members perhaps. As a rule not a

quarter of that number attended the annual general meeting. This year, however, there was something more than an auditor's report to engage their attention. Their secretary, who had, with some help from Mary Lalor and Father Hehir, and the passive acquiescence of the rest of the committee, made the Kildeely society a really going concern, was leaving them. He might possibly make a farewell speech, and good speeches are always worth hearing; while bad ones, if not too long, are entertaining when delivered by our daily acquaintances. Not only this, but his successor was to be chosen. True, that was the business of the committee, not of the general meeting—but who could tell: something interesting might come out of it, especially as so well known a local man as Peter Paul Vahey was in for the position. So the members turned up in full force and the schoolhouse was crowded after Mass, many people having come down from the Barnagweeha side of the parish specially for the meeting.

Father Hehir, as president of the society, took the chair. It was always Father Hehir who did things in Kildeely parish. Father Mulryan had thrown cold water on the co-operative project, when it was first broached, and now that it was in actual successful existence he gave it only a very Laodicean support, preferring such old-fashioned parishioners as Ambrose and Henry Hctor to the poorer and not very amenable farmers who made up the bulk of the society. But nobody really heeded Father Mulryan, though his special favourites for their own purposes made a show of doing so. It was to Father Hehir, the curate, nine out of ten of the people went to confession, it was Father Hehir who could make a collection for the language or any national need a

credit to Killeely, it was he and not the parish priest who could turn Peter's Pence into Peter's shillings.

Father Hehir stood at a desk at the far end of the room, Brian Hayes, the outgoing secretary, beside him, with ledger and minute book. Behind them over the fireplace a huge map of Ireland hung on the wall. On each side of the room the spaces between the windows were filled with other maps, or pictures connected with the direct method of teaching Irish.

The committee sat for the most part on the fore-most benches. Behind them the seats were packed with farmers old and young, the later arrivals standing in a closely packed crowd at the door. Mary came in late, but found a chair, the only one in the room, reserved for her under the map of Ireland.

Father Hehir was not an inveterate orator. He kept his eloquence for the occasions when it was wanted. On this Sunday morning he was severely businesslike. The minutes, adoption of balance sheet, and the formal business were, under his direction, disposed of with a minimum of discussion in a very short time. He then announced, a thing which everyone already knew, that their secretary was leaving them; that he wished him success in the name of the society, and that there were two applicants for the position he was vacating. He did not, however, mention their names, but proceeded at once to the election, or rather to the re-election, of the committee.

"The secretary will now read out the names of the present committee," he announced, "together with the number of attendances which each has made at committee meetings. You will notice that out of a possible twelve meetings several have attended ten times; on the other hand two did not think fit to come at all. You can re-elect all, or put off some and choose others in their place if you prefer."

"Why didn't you attend the meetings, Mick?" cried a voice.

"He's not here," shouted several.

A momentary silence ensued. Then a small man with grey side-whiskers and a black clerical hat voiced the unanimous feeling of the meeting when he said: "Mick's a good man, anyway; doesn't he deal regular with the society and what more do you want?"

"A man that will mind our business as well as his own," said someone, more in joke than in earnest.

"Put him on again," was the cry.

Ambrose Hctor separated himself from the crowd at the door and addressed the chair:

"Rev. Chairman and Gentlemen," he said, "it is not my intention to make a speech." (Cries of "Speech" and "Thanks be to God.") "I merely wish to give expression to what I believe to be the unanimous and genuine opinion of the body here met in conclave to-day. We have in our midst a worthy and redoubtable champion of the movement which it is the first care of all of us to support." (A voice, "Where do *you* deal?" and laughter.) "This is no time, gentlemen, for controversial insinuations. I am referring to Mr. O'Hickie, a man now well known to you as a wholehearted supporter of our movement for the betterment of the Irish people and the Irish Nation." (Cheers.) "I wish to propose, Rev. Chairman, that his name be added to the list of names for election to the committee. As you all know he is. . . ."

Father Hehir interrupted him: "Our rules lay down a committee of sixteen persons. We cannot, therefore, have seventeen. If Mr. O'Hickie is to be elected someone else will have to stand down."

Con rose to deprecate any such idea, but before he

could say a word an old man, very tall and bent, called out : " I'm too old for committees : let him have my place, and welcome."

Ambrose, delighted at the possibility of thus eliminating a potential opponent of Peter Paul's, resumed in time to silence inevitable protests against the retirement of anyone.

" John O'Regan has given us an example of self-sacrifice not to be forgotten," he continued. " I now move that the old committee be re-elected, the name of Mr. O'Hickie being substituted for that of Mr. O'Regan."

" I second that," said Peter Paul Vahey, quickly.

The vote was unanimous and the business of the meeting was over. The committee remained behind after the others had gone out. Ambrose found an excuse for a word with the secretary, and, as he passed Con, he said : " We rely on your vote, Mr. O'Hickie."

Con was too much taken aback to reply, but he asked Mary what she intended to do.

" Surely you don't contemplate for a moment voting for that schemer !" she said. " Why, the society would be dead in six months if he became secretary. William Browne is a splendid man, just what we want : he knows the work of a co-operative store in and out."

" Vahey has been canvassing very hard," he told her.

" Heavens !" she replied, " I wonder does Father Tom know. Personally I only heard of his candidature yesterday. It would be a catastrophe. He may have some of our weaker vessels squared. How well he didn't canvass me !" she added, as she moved to where Father Hehir was standing, to have a word with him on the subject. They had sat down again

in the now almost empty room, and the proceedings, which had been invested with an unusual amount of ceremony at the general meeting by reason of Ambrose Hoctor's intervention, resumed their ordinary informal character.

"The candidates are William Browne and Peter Paul Vahey," the chairman remarked, when they had dispensed with the other business on the agenda. "Does anyone propose either of these?"

Mary at once proposed Browne, mentioning that he had previously been manager of another co-operative society, and that they were lucky to get the chance of so good a man. A farmer from Barnagweeha seconded.

"I propose Mr. Peter Paul Vahey," said Mick Kennedy, the owner of Kennedy's Mountain above Rathcarrig. "In my opinion we should not go outside our own, if we can help it. Here's a smart man belongs to the parish, looking for a job that's ours to give. There's nothing again' Peter Paul that I know: we all know him from a gorsoon. Why bring in a stranger that has no call to our money? 'Tis our money will pay him, mind. The society was begun in Killeely for the good of Killeely, not for the good of outsiders."

"Mick Kennedy's right there," said one or two of the committee men.

Every man in the room with the exception of Father Hehir and Con took part in the discussion which ensued. Con calculated from their remarks that local feeling would probably result in the election of Peter Paul by one vote. Possibly Father Hehir would have to use his casting vote.

The ballot was not used by the committee of the Killeely Co-operative Society, even when so delicate a matter as the election of a secretary was afoot, and

Brian Hayes proceeded, with the indifference of a man carrying out a last act of duty, to read the names of the committee from the list among his papers. Con's name as the new member came last. Of the others, two were absent, two unexpectedly abstained from voting, and when it came to his turn the figures were five for Vahey and five for Browne.

Brian Hayes called out his name : " Mr. O'Hickie."

" Browne," said Con, emphatically.

" My vote is not required," announced Father Hehir, " William Browne is elected by six votes to five."

Kennedy ran to the door : " Beaten by Hickie's vote," he cried to Peter Paul and the crowd who were waiting outside.

Con accompanied Mary to her lodge gate at the top of the street. When they had passed through the loiterers outside the school he said :

" Did you notice the way they gave us the cold shoulder as we went out ? "

" That was Peter Paul's crowd," she replied ; " what did you expect ? They have already put down their defeat to you."

" After all," said Con, " your vote or any of the six was as much a deciding factor as mine."

" Yes, but yours came last when it was a tie ; and besides you were an unknown quantity : you may be sure they had the rest of us correctly labelled beforehand. I'm surprised at Kennedy being so strong for Vahey all the same."

" Why ? "

" Well, he's quite a useful co-operator, though he is as hard as nails, as you'll find out if you have any dealings with him. But there is no better man than Kennedy when it comes to a question of getting in

money or being stiff about prices. You'll get to know the little problems we have to deal with now. Local sensitiveness is always cropping up at our committee meetings."

"I'm glad I voted for Browne, anyway," said Con.

"Thank Heavens he's in," Mary exclaimed. "I expect the Vahey crowd will try to annoy you over it if they can."

"I didn't like being proposed for the committee by Ambrose Hocter and seconded by Peter Paul," said Con after a moment.

"No, it made your position rather awkward," she replied.

"What do you think of Ambrose?" he asked.

"Oh, Ambrose!" Mary repeated contemptuously. "He's in the society for the sole purpose of acting as his brother's agent. Henry Hocter would like to smash us, of course. Ambrose deals at the store to a certain extent anyway, so that he keeps himself right with us. It is worth Henry's while to lose a little trade to get a chance such as they had to-day. I daresay the two men who stayed away had promised to vote for Vahey, and didn't like to do what they knew was against the interest of the society. The abstainers will have to account for themselves, too, I expect. Certainly Henry Hocter would have won the battle if he had succeeded in getting Peter Paul elected as secretary."

"I perceive that I am a marked man," said Con, as he parted from her at the gate.

He turned and walked back down the street. Ambrose and Peter Paul passed him, making for Henry Hocter's side door. Ambrose addressed him over his shoulder without his usual show of deference.

"You didn't act square," he said. "As like as not you'll regret it one of these days."

Con did not reply, but as he walked home he felt a certain sense of uneasiness. His nerves were still a trifle shaky after his illness. The incident entirely obsessed his mind, and it was not until he turned aside near home to look at a bunch of calves, which he had bought from Mary Lalor, that he remembered with surprise how naturally they had already resumed their previous relationship of friendly neighbours.

"Peter Paul has saved me a period of awkward embarrassment at any rate," he said to himself; "let him do what he likes he can't undo that."

"I'm going to take a week's holiday at Lahinch," he told Lally when she brought in his belated dinner.

"The divil a harm 'twill do you," said she, with the familiarity of an ancient woman-servant. "You had a right to get married to some nice young lady," she went on, "and not be killing yourself the way you are, taking your meals at all hours, and you only off a bed of sickness a couple o' days."

Con laughed. He was thinking of the changes marriage would mean in the régime at Rathcarrig. Lally was invaluable in a house where dirt could be excused when half the rooms were occupied by corn bins, harness, and farm tools. She fed pigs and chickens, cleaned his boots and made his bed. She churned and did a thousand things single-handed, but she was as indifferent to dirt as a canal bargee, and would show visitors to her kitchen a blade of oats growing in a damp and dusty corner, with a pride hardly equalled by Con as he contemplated a ten acre field on the farm outside.

"What about you if I did?" said Con, tacitly alluding to her idiosyncracies of this nature.

"You'd better marry me," she said, as she shuffled through the door to avoid the piece of bread he aimed at her.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was dinnertime at Rathcarrig and all but the few men who lived near enough to go to their homes and back between twelve and one o'clock were seated around a fire of sticks in an outhouse in the yard. A kettle hung on a hook above the blaze, and as it came to the boil each man wet his tea in his own pot, producing from a bag or handkerchief a small bottle of milk to colour it and some thick chunks of soda bread—with a little butter between the slices—to satisfy hunger. Little was said while the meal was in progress, but talk became general during the pleasant half-hour before the one o'clock bell summoned them back to work.

"I saw himself going away," said Thady Comyn, the herd. "He was driving the yellow mare and he had Bill Mack with him. About half past nine he went: I was counting the heifers in the Avenue field at the time after me breakfast."

"'Tis well for you having your breakfast so late," said Tim MacDwyer.

"If I do itself," replied Thady, "I do be often working in the night and you asleep comfortable in your bed."

"Yerra, what work!" said Tim scornfully. "'Tis the hard work walking round looking at cattle. You don't know what work is any more than Henry Hctor beyond in his shop. Long hours don't make hard work."

In the argument which ensued the verdict was given by an unmistakable majority for the manual workers ; the brain worker, the professional man, the shop assistant and the clerk being regarded almost as people of leisure : for the day had not yet come when school teachers would send delegates to the Trades Congress and clerical workers would have a Union of their own. It was quite generally agreed, however, that Con might be counted a worker.

"Where did the boss go, d'you know ?" asked one of the MacMahons.

"'Tis likely he went to Ennis to meet the train for the West," said Thady. "I heard he was to go on holidays to Lahinch."

"He'd want a holiday, anyway, the poor man," said the elder MacMahon, from the far corner of the outhouse, where he was stretched at full length on the floor. "Give me a pull of the pipe, Tommy : you've enough of it taken for a start."

His brother handed him the pipe, saying : "Here you are, so. I declare to God you'd take the cross off an ass, you're that covetous. The boss is a decent man. I didn't meet an honester man for the whole four years I'm working here."

"That's a fact," said one or two.

"Well, 'tis a fact more'n one man in the town of Killeely would not agree to," said Tommy.

"How's that ?"

"Don't you know well Peter Paul and his crowd is never done abusing him," said Tommy. "Tim MacDwyer there can tell you, for he was with me in Killeely a couple of nights back. We were after having a drink at Mynahan's and we turned into Hoor's to see who was in it. 'Twas the fair day, wasn't it Tim ? Anyway, there was a share of

laddybucks inside in the shop looking to see could they pick up a couple o' pints handy. Mick Kennedy was there buying something at the counter. When he saw us he brought us over to treat us."

"'Tis seldom with him to do that same," said Paddy Stack.

"Wait a while now, till you see," continued Tommy. "I had hardly got the taste of the pint when out came Mick Kennedy's second cousin, Peter Paul Vahey."

"They say them two is very great since the time Peter Paul was looking for the job in the co-operative," put in Tommy's brother.

"Why wouldn't they be," said Tommy MacMahon, "aren't they friends. 'Tis said Mick did his 'davours best canvassing for him before the giving of the job came on at all, and spoke up for him hot at the meeting, too."

"There's too many cousins here around," said Stack, "a man would be as well off to be without any relations in the place at all, like Mr. O'Hickie or old John Spellissey. I'd as lief be without friends at all, for all the good they are to a man."

"You'd have a different story if you were looking for a job as ganger on the roads."

"The divil a fear I'll be looking for any job other than the one I have, as long as I can keep it, and that's a sure five."

"I'm not faulting the job," said Tommy, "though the pay is light enough."

"'Tis as good as the roads, whatever; and 'tis constant, what the roads is not. Mr. O'Hickie raised our wages without one of us saying a word to him."

"He did," Tommy agreed, "and that puts me in mind of what I was saying about that night in Hector's. Peter Paul came out and joined us in a drink. There's times when there's a plentiness of

drink to be had without looking for it at all. When we had Mick Kennedy's drink finished Peter Paul stood a round, and while we were taking it he commenced asking us questions about the way things were, here in Rathcarrig. He had it in his mind that more than one of us wasn't satisfied with the job, however he came to think it."

"Jack Hanvy has been putting stories about," said Stack.

"As like as not," Tommy agreed. "Anyway, to make a long story short, he hinted that Tim and I and the rest of you hadn't much spunk to be letting ourselves be trodden on by a stranger no one knew anything about."

"'Twas the very cut of him to say that," said his brother. "'Tis a thing I'd give him a puc in the jaw, if I was in it."

"'Twas not easy say much to him and we taking his drink," said Tim MacDwyer. "But I tell you this, I always liked the boss middling well before, but when I see what Peter Paul was driving at I said to myself, whatever way I get on with Mr. O'Hickie 'tis a long day before I'll be said by you in the matter, Mr. Peter Paul."

"'Tis a pity you didn't say it out," said Thady.

"All the same," said Tommy, "oughtn't we look for another shilling."

"I'll not look for any shilling, for one," said Thady, "I'll leave it to himself."

"Sure, he can well afford it and prices is going up every day," said Tommy.

"What do you know about it," said Stack, "and you living at home."

"I know as much as you," said Tommy. "Sure, you're not married a twelvemonth yourself. Look at

here, Mick, give me back me pipe. You have more than your share of it."

Another man called O'Brien, who had taken Jack Hanvy's place, had come back from his dinner while they were talking, and he spoke now for the first time.

"In my opinion," he said, "Tommy MacMahon's the only man of you here that has sense. We should look for another shilling, or maybe two: we had a right to do it before the harvest was saved. The boss has money enough to pay it and if Tommy'll go with me I'll ask him meself when he comes back."

"Will he be long away?" someone asked, and Spellissey, who joined them at the moment, replied:

"I hope he'll stay a month at Lahinch, though it's hard enough on me minding you buckos while he's away. But he'd want a holiday after his long sickness."

"Indeed, he would," they agreed.

"'Tis a wonder but he'd get someone to mind him," said Thady.

"Why not?" replied Paddy. "Isn't he every day courting Miss Mary beyond."

"'Tis my belief he don't give a damn for any girl," said Mick MacMahon.

"'Tis little you know then," said Tommy. "'Tis said by more than one that he wasn't above taking a kiss from Peggy Folane—Miss Folane, the governess at Gortroe, that was teacher in Keownstown."

"Yerra, go to blazes out o' that," said Paddy, "you've too much talk for a young fellow. He'll make a match with Miss Mary, you see if he don't. 'Twould be made by this, only there's no one to fix it between them."

"'Twould be a good match," said Spellissey reflectively, "and a fine place they'd have with her good land joined on to Rathcarrig. God grant it will come," he added.

"Miss Mary would make a good mistress, but she's mad for work like himself," said Tim. "He nearly took the wind of me the last wet day was in it: we knocked the old sycamore abroad in the lawn without once taking time to draw our breath. I was ashamed to stop when he didn't."

"He'd be a good man if he'd knock the wind out of you," said Tommy: for they all regarded Tim as their leader in any work that wanted strength and skill because of the power of his long, thin arms and the knack he possessed, even more than the others, of using the last ounce of his strength effectively and without undue effort.

"Don't mind him, Tommy," said Paddy Stack. "The boss's a good warrant to do some jobs, but he's a thing or two to learn yet."

"'Tisn't easy fool him all the same," said Tommy.

"'Tis not, but maybe he's a bit too cross about things that don't matter," said Paddy, as the bell rang and they went out again to work. "'Twould be a great thing if he made it up with Miss Mary, anyway," he added, going to the stable to get his horse.

Meanwhile Con was being jolted along in the miniature train on his journey from Ennis to Lahinch. He was quite oblivious to the interest his doings and his future had for the people of Kilteely, nor did he suspect that he had in Peter Paul Vahey and Jack Hanvy unscrupulous enemies who hoped to avenge, by whatever underhand means came to their hand, the injury which one deemed to have been done him by Con's independent vote and the other by his outspoken tongue. Now that he was away from the disturbing preoccupations of Rathcarrig he put his daily work out of his mind, and he was able to do this the more easily because his illness proved to him,

rather to his surprise, that the place could get on without him for at least a few weeks, and because he had his major cares, his hay and his corn, safe.

Yet he was not altogether in holiday mood. The episode of his proposal to Mary Lalor left him dissatisfied with himself. Never before, since he was a boy, did he realize the need of companionship and sympathy. His new relationship with Mary, pleasant though it had become already, did not give him what he needed ; rather it emphasized its absence. Nevertheless he was determined to enjoy his holiday if he could, and the sound of the breakers on the strand, the smell of the sea, and the homely, welcoming look of the little village combined to put him in a more cheerful frame of mind as he walked down from the station to the house in which he had taken a room for the remainder of the month.

CHAPTER XIX

There was no one staying in the house whom Con knew, and after his tea he sauntered out towards the little stone pier at which no boat has ever called, though it is said to have a value as a breakwater, preventing the wholesale destruction of the village when storms beat on it from the west. He fell into conversation with other holiday makers, and remained leaning over the iron railing which runs along what is known as "the front," or walked up and down that concrete path until the sun had set in a fiery red ball behind the silhouette of Liscannor Castle, giving promise of fine weather to follow. The evening was warm. He was in no hurry to go in to his cramped lodging, and it was not until lights began to shine out in upper rooms that he took a last deep breath of the salt air and turned down the narrow lane which led to his sojourning place.

He had seen no one he knew, and as he was not in the mood to meet the people who were likely to be finishing their summer holidays at Lahinch he had not bothered to inquire who might be staying at the hotels or in any of the lodges.

But if he had seen no friend of his that evening he had been seen and watched by someone who knew him well ; for one of the windows that shone out into the darkness after the sun had gone down was lighted by Peggy Folane.

The Keanes being an agricultural family took their

annual holiday later than professional people, or than those of their own class who contributed very little to the operations on which they partly lived. So it happened that Dick Keane and his wife and three children had installed themselves in one of the lodges on the sea front, which had been vacated by a Dublin barrister and his *ménage* only a few days before.

Peggy was in the habit of taking her tea with the children about six o'clock, so that her absence from the sittingroom below, whither she should have gone for the evening, was not so noticeable as it would have been if she had been expected to appear at dinner as well. To-night she was in a mood so far removed from the attitude of smiling self-effacement required of her that she did not contemplate going downstairs. She remained instead in the bedroom.

In the temporary régime adopted for their Lahinch visit she shared with the three children the only bedroom of any size in the house. It was just large enough to hold three narrow iron bedsteads and a cot for little Dick. The floor was of bare, unpolished boards. A small washhandstand was stowed away in a chance space at one corner of the room ; a rickety chest of drawers stood in front of the window, which was kept open by means of a hair-brush under the sash.

The long day in the fresh air brought sleep to the children without any effort on Peggy's part, and when she heard the slow, steady breathing which told her that Jack had joined the other two in slumber she went over to the window, half-hoping to see Con outside walking up and down in the dusk or leaning over the railing near the jetty as she had seen him half an hour before. Just as she looked out he passed close under her window, walking slowly and pensively. The sudden realization of his presence so near her,

even though she had half expected it, gave her a strange pang, half delight, half bitterness. She knew now, perhaps she had known for some time, that he was the one man in the world for her. She felt that she could sacrifice anything for his sake, that she would do anything at that moment to feel his arms around her so that she could abandon herself to the intoxication of loving him. But bitterness lay in this thought, for what reason had she to believe that he loved her at all? She had believed it at first, and, believing it, she had gone against the commonsense wishes of her family and had become a nursery governess in order to be near him. She entirely exonerated him from all responsibility for this, saying to herself that he probably regarded it as a step upwards for her rather than as an acceptance of an almost servile position in exchange for her liberty and independence. She did not try to deceive herself; she almost exulted in her mental acknowledgement that he had really won her that first night at Keownstown. He was so different from all the men she knew at home or had met when she was away at the training school or at the Gaelic College she had attended when she was learning Irish. He had the manner of a gentleman without the air of superiority or well-bred condescension which she was accustomed to meet among such men of his class as she had encountered. She was amazed at the self-control she had shewn in her dealings with him, for she had not allowed herself a repetition of the freedom of that night at Keownstown, though Con had more than once seemed anxious to renew their first relationship. It is hard to account for motives. Perhaps the reason she held him at arm's length was some subconscious instinct telling her that what he wanted was the renewal of a pleasant

flirtation, not the real love she looked for. Certainly her unaccountable moods when she was with him had produced of late a certain coolness, or at the least a slackening of intimacy between them.

She leant for a long time at the window with her elbows on the dressingtable watching the ripples in the bay shimmering in the light of the September moon. Then half in tears, so hopeless did she feel of her future, she turned in and began to undress.

Assuredly no more lovely girl was in Clare that night, in all Ireland perhaps, than sad-eyed Peggy, as she stood before the little square looking-glass brushing her long, black hair by the light of a single candle. At least fate was kind when it ordained that she should not be condemned to the rough life of a farmer's daughter at home : her hands were unspoilt by drudgery, and her bare arms, which she moved so gracefully as she brushed her hair, were not hard and masculine as farm work would have made them. Her life at Gortroe, too, slavery though it had been in many respects despite her fondness for the children, had given her an insight she would not have gained at home or as a school teacher into the niceties of a lady's dress and toilet. Though she was poor she was careful to have nice underclothes and to observe a hundred little details of personal appearance undreamt of among her Keownstown associates.

Peggy was a modest girl. Though little Jack was but seven years old his presence in her bedroom produced in her a queer sense of shyness, and she glanced her shoulder at his bed to make sure that he was really asleep before she finished undressing. Then she tied the ribbon in her nightdress, and, blowing out the candle, knelt down to say her prayers.

She remained on her knees for some time, wandering

from prayers back into the reverie she had been following at the window a few minutes before. She was going over the retrospect once more, and had grown quite oblivious to her surroundings when she was sharply recalled to reality by a light tap at the door. She slipped quickly into bed as she softly said : "Come in."

The door opened, and Mrs. Keane entered, a candle held high in her hand to guide her across the congested bedroom. Peggy watched her, admiring the new pink evening dress she was wearing. "How well it suits her young face and white hair," she thought, and passed in review her own poor stock of dresses.

Her employer put the candle on the chest of drawers and sat down on the edge of Peggy's bed before she spoke. Peggy leaned forward to hear her, for they dared not speak above a whisper for fear of waking the sleeping children. Mrs. Keane felt a momentary twinge of envy as she caught a glimpse in Peggy's sudden movement of her smooth, white neck and the firm, curving outline of her bosom.

"I was thinking you might have a headache, dear," she began, "when you didn't come down to sit with us. I've brought some aspirin in case." She held up a small bottle as she spoke.

"You are very kind," said Peggy, "but I'm glad to say I'm quite well. I felt a little tired, but, to tell you the truth, somehow I was not in the mood to talk to-night, so I decided on a sudden impulse to go to bed. I only got into bed just before you came."

"I'm very glad you're all right," said the elder woman, and then, after a pause, she spoke a while of the children and their plans for the following day.

Another silence fell between them. Mrs Keane beat a tune uncertainly on her knee with her fingers, saying after a minute in a kind but puzzled tone :

"You're a strange girl, Miss Folane ; sometimes I think you're not quite happy."

"Oh ! I think I am," Peggy replied.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Keane. "If I had to make a guess I'd say you were in love." She gave a little, quiet, sympathetic laugh as she spoke.

"Oh !" said Peggy involuntarily.

"Tell me about it," whispered Mrs. Keane, curious as well as sympathetic.

"I've not much to say about being in love," said Peggy. "Indeed, I don't think I'm in love with anybody at all, except your little Jack perhaps. I fancy that is what made me sad, for I've made up my mind to tell you that I must leave Gortroe."

"Oh, you don't mean that," exclaimed her employer, unconsciously raising her voice so that they both held their breath for a moment, fearing lest the sound should waken the children. "Why do you want to leave us ?" she added.

At first Peggy was reticent, but after a little pressing she began to speak of the way she felt : like a bird in a cage surrounded by everything she could want for her comfort, but eager for flight and liberty. Do what she would Mrs. Keane could not persuade her to change her mind. "You are in a romantic mood to-night," she said, bending down to kiss Peggy for the first time in the three years she had known her. "Perhaps you will feel differently to-morrow—I sincerely hope you will at any rate," she said, as she went out of the room.

As the door closed Peggy burst into tears, and when Jack Keane woke for a moment an hour later he was vaguely conscious of the sound of sobbing in the room. But the next morning he had no recollection of the half-waking second in which he had been a witness of her sadness,

Downstairs Dick Keane was yawning and wishing it were bedtime. He did not seem unduly concerned when his wife said: "Miss Folane has given me notice."

"Why?" he asked.

"I don't know," she replied. "In fact I can't make her out. She's in love with someone, I think, probably some hulking fellow, not half good enough for her, who has been playing with her, perhaps."

"Didn't you tell me once there might be something between her and Con O'Hickie? I pooh-poohed it at the time."

"Yes, I remember. No, I don't think there's anything in that. He's hardly seen her since he got ill last June or July."

"Perhaps that's what's put her out."

"Perhaps, yet I hardly think so; Con's much more with Mary Lalor than he used to be. I have hopes something may come of it."

"Oh, don't let's start that subject," he said, yawning again. "I'm going to bed, however early it is. As to Miss Folane there are plenty more governesses to be got. I'm sorry she's going, but I don't see a whole lot in her besides her pretty face and figure."

"Well, I'm sorry, Dick, all the same. She has a charm about her, though I've never got to the bottom of her myself. I suppose you'll be snoring by the time I come up. I can't go to bed before half past ten."

"Good-night, and don't fuss about nothing," said her husband.

"Good-night, you old philosopher," she replied.

CHAPTER XX

Con awoke in his strange room with that feeling of uncertainty as to his whereabouts which is invariably experienced by people who seldom sleep away from home. In the first moments of semi-consciousness he struggled to understand why the window was so small, and why it was on his left hand instead of being beyond the foot of the bed as usual. Then it dawned upon him that he was under no obligation to be in the yard at the half past seven bell ; that he could stay in bed till ten o'clock if he liked without any troublesome consequences. He turned over and dozed for nearly two hours, revelling in his own laziness.

When at length he went down to breakfast there was only one man in the room, a queer, thin, gaunt figure, who proved to be a school inspector taking a long week-end at the seaside in an interval of freedom from duty. Con sat down opposite to him where he saw a place set with a thick delph cup and saucer, a bent fork and a knife worn thin by years of cleaning. He exchanged a few remarks with the bony inspector in the Norfolk jacket and highly respectable white collar. Though they had a fine day before them they were equally undecided how they would spend it. Con, who was not a golfer, had no plan beyond a vague intention of bathing some time ; the ideas of his new acquaintance, Mr. Cannon, stopped short at a stroll on the strand. They smoked a leisurely pipe after breakfast, talking of the comparatively trivial things

which passed in those uneventful days for matters of public interest. After a time they procured towels (Con speculating what sort of a picture Mr. Cannon would make without his clothes) and sallied out.

The front was full of people. Schoolboys and flappers walked up and down in threes and fours, barefooted youngsters ran in and out of the crowd of passers-by, solid farmers from inland sat upon the benches with their wives and elder daughters, gazing silently out to sea; here and there young women were devouring sevenpenny novels, while near the police barracks a youthful constable sat upon the wall swinging his legs and leering at a dawdling nursemaid. Around the breakwater a knot of spectators watched the proceedings at the ladies' bathing-place, where almost the entire female population of the village, from white-headed grandmothers to little girls, were taking their daily dip: some hesitating on the brink, the ample pink nightdresses, which fashion in Lahinch substitutes for the more sophisticated bathing costume of other watering-places, scarcely wet above the hem; others, hand in hand, were bobbing up and down as the waves rolled in; and some, their ablutions finished, were drying and dressing in the centre of sheltering circles of other women—protected from the inquisitive gaze of onlookers, not by bathing boxes, but by a human screen.

Con and Mr. Cannon threaded their way through the gazers and the knots of young and middle-aged women, who, with damp hair hanging full length around them, were standing about after their bathe, and made their way over the great natural breastwork of boulders and pebbles towards the stretch of sand-hills beyond.

While the women's bathing place at Lahinch

occupies a confined area under the eyes of all, the stretch set apart for the men is generous in its expanse : it covers, indeed, the whole extent of the strand until it ends in the soft sand at the mouth of the Inagh river, a mile or two from the village. Male bathers are entirely free from circumscribing conventions, the only custom universally observed being the practice of wearing no covering whatever, not even the ridiculous hold-all ephod affected by the *élite* among swimmers in some places. Naked men attract no attention at Lahinch, and Con and his companion stripped and bathed quite cheerfully, though while they were in the water a woman settled herself down on the stones not far from their heaps of clothes, and sat there quite unconcernedly, hardly observing their presence at all when at length they ran back over the wet sand to the place where they had undressed.

Con proposed a walk along the sandhills and they clambered over the stones on to the path above. They strolled in the direction of the river, Mr. Cannon discoursing of the industrial possibilities of kelp and Moher slates, while Con, only half listening to him, watched the mysterious foam of the waves breaking on the legended isle of Cillstifiann away beyond the Hag's Head, or followed the flocks of oyster catchers as they flew from place to place along the wet strand. Mr. Cannon was just telling him the history of the third company which had ruined itself by mismanaging the slate quarries when Con's drowsy faculties were suddenly whipped into activity by the sight of a girl in a pale blue linen dress perched among the bents on a sandhill above them. She was leaning back in an easy, careless attitude, looking out to sea ; she did not appear to have noticed them, for their footsteps made no sound upon the grassy path. Con knew at once

that the girl was Peggy, though he had had no idea that she was in Lahinch.

He stopped abruptly and interrupted the story Mr. Cannon was telling so meticulously :

“ By jove,” he said, “ I’ve just remembered I have to send a most important wire. Excuse me, I must go back ; we’ll meet at dinner, I hope. Don’t let me spoil your walk,” and he turned back quickly, giving his companion no opportunity of accompanying him.

As soon as he had passed over the first height on his way to the village Con stopped, and, turning back again, lay down on the mound, and watched the receding figure of Mr. Cannon until it disappeared from view into a dip in the path. Then he struck out across the grassy kopjes and made for the one on which he had seen Peggy, approaching it from the far side.

He reached the top and looked over. There she was, just below him. Her wide-brimmed straw hat lay on the grass beside her and he admired the lustre of her black hair in the sunlight. He was at a loss to account for his motive in thus approaching her by stealth, and he wondered how he should make her aware of his presence without startling her. He noticed with a feeling of pleasure that she was alone.

He remained for a few seconds looking at her with growing admiration of her unfailing grace of pose, while he deliberated on his next step. After a moment’s hesitation he retreated a few yards down the hill and whistled some bars of “ Erin ! the tear and the smile in thine eyes,” an air he knew she loved. Still whistling, he climbed up again and found her looking up towards him with a quaint, half-puzzled expression which quickly changed to a smile of delight. Again that fascinating blush, which had bewitched

him the day they met at Killeely post office, cast its spell on him. She felt it mounting unbidden to her face and could not suppress it. Her secret was half out already, before they had opened their lips.

Con was the first to speak: "Well, of all the absolutely delightful things I can think of, nothing can touch finding you here," he said.

Peggy stammered something almost conventional in reply.

"What ages it is since I've seen you without someone else being with us," said Con. "Let's go over to the other side of this hill and have a talk. It's not so public there, and you must have seen enough of the sea to be able to look at something else for a while."

He gave her his hand to get up and though she did not need it she took it.

They found a comfortable spot near by and sat down. The tall, sharp rushes grew in thick bunches around them. Everywhere in the short, sweet grass tiny flowers, purple and yellow pansies, and yellow trefoil turning to a brilliant burnished orange, peeped up at them like shy fairies. Away in the distance the gaunt skeleton of Duagh Castle carried the eye across the junction of the rivers to the bare, low hills beyond.

"I can't tell you what a pleasant shock I got when I saw you on this hill," Con said again as they stretched themselves out on the grass. "The Keanes are here, I suppose."

"They are," she replied.

"How did you get off alone?" asked Con.

"I don't know why, but Mrs. Keane packed off Mr. Keane and Jack to Liscannor, and took Nancy and Dick herself. She told me to take the morning off, and I'm doing it."

"That's queer; 'tis seldom she doesn't leave you one of the kids, I believe. You didn't seem much surprised to see me," he added.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I saw you last night on the front."

"Did you now; why didn't you discover yourself?"

"I was looking out of my bedroom window and couldn't very well."

Con looked at her, puzzled by the catch in her voice:

"When are you going back to Gortroe?" he inquired after a moment's silence.

"I'm not . . ." began Peggy, but she could get no farther. Her sense of utter loneliness, accentuated by the sudden joy of Con's friendly manner and obviously genuine delight at seeing her, overcame her. Tears, which she could not hold back, filled her eyes and blinded her. She turned away from him, trying to hide her agitation, but with a quick, impetuous movement he came close beside her and laid his hand on her knee:

"Peggy," he exclaimed, his voice full of sympathy.

The tears flowed faster and she did not answer him. Con took no thought of what he did. A wave of overpowering emotion welled into his heart. His actions were instinctive and compelling, and his words, when he found his tongue, were uttered with a fervour and self-confidence quite foreign to his normal self.

"My darling," he said softly, putting his arm round her and drawing her head on to his shoulder. "I love you: I love you," he repeated half to himself, as if to bring out the full meaning of what he was saying. "Somehow I feel you . . . love me too. But if you did you wouldn't be so unhappy," he added, a note of uncertainty creeping into his voice.

She made no effort now to control her sobs, but clung to him closely, burying her head on his shoulder.

Con felt a sudden inclination to shout aloud.

"Thank God I have you," he said joyously. "Now I know—Oh, what a fool I've been lately and what a brute. My glorious, beloved Peggy, I love you : I love you."

Peggy's passionate outburst quickly spent itself as soon as she made no further attempt to stem it, and after a few moments, moments of exquisite delight to Con, who somehow felt the change coming over her, she was smiling at him through her tears, her eyes radiant with the passion she had tacitly admitted by her acquiescence.

Her kiss thrilled every fibre in Con's body. He forgot that he had ever kissed her before, so different was the touch of her lips now from their half-careless kisses at the Keownstown dance.

"Now tell me in words," he commanded.

Peggy turned to Irish as the fittest medium for expressing her devotion. Con understood her, though she made use of many words he had not heard before.

For a long time, though it seemed but a few moments to them, they travelled the immemorial path of love, newly declared but long felt inwardly by one of them at least ; and they pursued the god with a passion not given to all lovers to attain, for it was intensified on her part by suppression in days now gone for ever, and on his by the suddenness of his discovery of a truth long obscured by the cross currents of his life. At length a movement of her arm revealed to them the fact that the hands of her wrist-watch pointed to half past one :

"Heavens !" said Con, in a more matter of fact voice, "'tis past lunch time. My first act in our life

together is one of thoughtless selfishness. A bad beginning, I'm afraid."

Peggy laughed happily as she admitted her complicity in the act. "Lunch!" she said, contemptuously. "But," she added more seriously, "I was to be back to take charge of Nancy and Dick for the afternoon—Mrs. Keane has a golf match on at a quarter to three. . . . What will I do?"

"We'll go and face her together," said Con.

"I'd face the whole world with you, Con," she said.

CHAPTER XXI

The marriage of Con O'Hickie and Peggy Folane was a nine days wonder to the people of Kiltelly and the neighbourhood. Indeed, the nine days had almost passed nine times over before it ceased to be a daily subject of excited conversation ; so unexpected had the marriage been, so quickly done and so quietly.

Perhaps no one in the place was less surprised at the event than Mary Lalor or more interested in it ; for of all his neighbours she knew Con best, and she liked Peggy, with whom she had formed a genuine friendship, originating from her fervent advocacy of a cause which Mary had since made her own.

Though a multitude of stories were already current about her friends, nothing definite could be learned beyond the undisputed fact that they were actually married and that they had not returned to Rathcarrig. This much she could vouch for, for she had received a short note from Con a few days before. It ran thus :

WEST CLARE,
November 1st, '09.

MY DEAR MARY,

I think you knew before I did that Peggy and I were fated to fix things up. Well, as you may have heard, we were married at Lahinch three weeks ago. I don't know why I am writing to you about this (to us at least) ecstatic event, except that having now had time to view things in perspective I feel that you are

my friend. Peggy says she is sure you are hers too : *Buidheachas le Dia, mar sin*. Having thus installed you without your permission (!) in the position of family friend I'll say no more, but only warn you that if you do not in the meantime write repudiating that responsible post, you will probably receive a letter in the near future containing all sorts of requests (or should I say instructions?). You see we have to go home some time.

Yours affectionately,
CON O'HICKIE.

P.S.—I wonder how old Spellissey and 'Tim Mac-Dwyer are getting on with the work. Do look them up and see.—C.

Mary did not feel a trace of pique or annoyance at the thought of Con's rapidly transferred allegiance, because she knew well that the change did not involve a transfer of his affections. She was not in the least degree in love with Con herself, much as she liked him, so it had cost her no painful effort to refuse his offer of marriage, especially as a hundred little indications had told her before his illness that he was really fond of Peggy Folane ; and it is notorious that sick men are prone to imagine themselves in love with sympathetic nurses.

She was, however, consumed with curiosity (a trait not confined to women) to know more of the details of this romantic match ; and to satisfy this she set out, a few days after getting Con's letter, to visit the Keanes. They at least would know something, and she would have gone to Gortroe sooner if she had not been particularly busy at home, for her steward had left her suddenly ; and in addition to this she had

been anxious to go in to Rathcarrig, so that she might be able to report progress there as soon as Con should vouchsafe to let her have an address to write to.

She walked fast to keep warm, for the morning was very cold. Few people will forget the effect of the sudden gripping frost which fell on the country so early that winter. Everywhere the ash trees were shedding their still green leaves in a thick shower, and her feet fell silent save for the rustling they made in the heavy, green carpet which covered the iron-bound road. On all sides fields of mangolds were as yet unpulled, and their leaves hung limp over the roots, so that Mary thanked Heaven she had stayed at home to secure her own crop from the destruction which threatened to overtake that of her less bustling neighbours. The puddles on the road were slippery sheets of hard, black ice, and the birds sat huddled disconsolately in the hedges.

She was glowing all over after her quick walk, and her face was tingling with the cut of the sharp air. Mrs. Keane was evidently pleased to see her coming across the yard to the spot where she was engaged in feeding her hens.

"There is no need to ask how you are, Mary," said she, "though it's ages since I saw you last. You look the very picture of health."

"Oh, this sort of day gives one a colour," said Mary. "How are you getting on this long time, and how are the new Leghorns doing with you?"

"Middling only," she replied; and they talked for a while of the trials of the poultry-keeper in a climate where the rainfall often exceeds fifty inches.

"Now," said Mary, when they had finished this topic, "I'm dying to hear the news, and no one but you has it rightly."

"What news?"

"What news! The news about Mr. and Mrs. O'Hickie (as they are now), of course. Why, it's the sole subject of conversation for ten miles round, even now."

"Well, let's go inside to the fire," said Mrs. Keane. "I'm frozen out here, standing about. Dick is hunting out his skates which he hasn't used for years."

"I'm sure he never used them in November before," said Mary, following Mrs. Keane, through the back door.

"Now?" she said expectantly as they sat down at the diningroom fire.

"Well," said the elder woman, "I'm afraid my story will disappoint you by its skimpiness. But as you seem so anxious to hear all about it I'll tell you what I know. Let me see—yes. The first indication I had that anything was in the wind was one day when we'd been at Lahinch about a fortnight, I think. That evening Miss Folane didn't come down to the sittingroom, so about nine o'clock I went up to the children's bedroom where she slept. She was in bed. I remember how much I admired her: she has the loveliest neck. She said she was not sick at all and we talked a little. Then she told me she wanted to leave Gortroe. I gave her the morning off, next day, thinking she might be getting too much of the children and hoping she would change her mind. You know she was very useful; the children love her, and she has a charming manner, wherever she got it."

"She has the manners of a lady, naturally," said Mary.

"Yes, I think she has," Mrs. Keane agreed. "Anyhow, she didn't turn up to lunch, and I was feeling very cross with her about it, as I had a match on with Mrs. Sykes in the afternoon. I'd just finished

lunch when who should turn up but Con O'Hickie with her. She was in time, so my annoyance disappeared. But I hadn't time to really know how I felt about it, for Mr. O'Hickie rushed up to me and began to say that it was all his fault if she was late. Then he blurted out that she had accepted him that morning. He looked liked a schoolboy with delight and she looked as happy as he. None of the hard look of a successful man-hunter who has just made an excellent match for herself : I absolve her of that."

"Go on," said Mary. "Apparently there was no engagement and they rushed the wedding as quick as it could be done?"

"Oh, not quite," Mrs. Keane replied. "Con O'Hickie behaved in an impetuous sort of way, but Miss Folane was quite sensible. At least, she saw that she could not leave me in the lurch. She stayed on the fortnight with us at Lahinch, and would have come back here, only that I happened to chance on another suitable girl to take her place, and I knew she would be next to useless here under the circumstances. They were to be married the day after we left. Madness really, when you come to think of it."

"Yes, I suppose it is ; but still I feel certain they know their own minds. Do you know, I've expected this for some time."

"That's more than anyone else can say," said Mrs. Keane.

"Oh, lots of people are saying it all the same," said Mary. "Some people are always wise after the event, but I really did think it. Everyone I've talked to regards it as lunacy on his part. The people like Con and think he is lowering himself. But they don't know Peggy well as yet. Mr. Willoughby sniffed a little, and looked as though he was sorry such a monster as Con had ever been asked to Rivervale."

"Of course, it's social suicide," Mrs. Keane remarked.

"Well," said Mary, "he might carry it off, if it was only Peggy, for her charm would soon melt the heart of a stone. But Con is suspect with the county already. He was an unknown quantity when he came here four or five years ago, but he is now, as you know, a Gaelic Leaguer—a worse thing than a Nationalist in Mr. Willoughby's eyes : and then you won't disagree with me when I say that he doesn't add to his social qualifications by being a Catholic."

"I'm afraid that is so," said Mrs. Keane, "I don't think you can accuse me of religious bigotry," she added, laughing.

"Oh, you're simply a pagan who goes to church as a social duty," said Mary, laughing.

Dick Keane came in just then, a pair of very rusty skates in his hand.

"Hello, Mary," he said, "I hope you've your mangolds secured. What are you two chatting about—the everlasting wedding, I suppose !"

"I was just saying that Con O'Hickie had committed social suicide," said his wife.

"As like as not," said Keane, who was far too large-hearted and too lazy-going to be affected by a friend's impossibilism, whether social or political, however much he personally disagreed with it, "but if he has itself, this house is always open to him as long as it's mine."

"And so is ours," said Mary, "I don't think Con will care much about the rest of the county if the people he looks on as his friends don't give him the cold shoulder. I can't imagine why anyone should, though."

"The country people are down on him over it, do

you know," said Dick Keane. "Only this morning my ploughman insisted on talking to me about it. He is one of the few who have a good word for Mrs. O'Hickie, as we must call her now. Even he thinks that the proper match would have been 'Miss Mary.'"

Mary laughed without discomfiture. "That's because our lands adjoin," she said. "The people are all right: they'll welcome Peggy as soon as they get to know her."

"I hear she has a fortune," said Keane.

"How funny!" said his wife, "a nursery governess with a fortune."

"The Folanés are strong farmers near Keownstown," Keane explained. "She may get a hundred or so as a dowry, though I don't know will the ordinary customs apply in this exceptional case."

"I hope she will have something," said Mary.

"A few hundreds would do Con no harm," said Keane. "He's not too well off, I think, and a little ready money would help him greatly at Rathcarrig; such a straggling old place as it is, it eats money."

"Well, it's time he spent something on it," said Mrs. Keane. "He'll have to do up the house properly now and leave his fencing and draining one side for a bit."

"Here's Bridget with the lunch," said Keane as the door opened, "stay and drink their health, Mary," he added.

"Indeed I will, with a heart and a half," she replied. "But is it lucky to drink healths in water?"

"You must give up your frugal habits for one day," said he, "just for the sake of posterity."

CHAPTER XXII

Neither Con nor Peggy had ever, except in the vaguest way, thought much on the subject of marriage ; and from the day they drifted together on the sand-hills at Lahinch to the time they returned to Rathcarrig, married life seemed to them to be some wonderfully desirable state of existence, but a thing as indefinite as the conception of Heaven in a healthy man's mind, and almost as remote.

Their honeymoon in West Clare, spent in exploring the quiet places along the seaboard in search of the remains of a once vigorous language, left on Con's mind an impression of perfect happiness unmarred by a single jarring note, while to Peggy it brought at once repose of mind and a blessed relief from the circumscription of her past life and at the same time an expression of the wild passion which was in her nature. No petty incident of the way could annoy them : the contretemps which would normally have irritated them—a train missed, a hotel closed for the winter, even a blistered foot—only amused them; and their happiness seemed to infect the people with whom they came in contact. All the world loves a lover, and they were so patently lovers : not mawkish sentimentalists fawning and gazing, but a man and woman whose relationship is proclaimed by the light in their eyes and by something in their simplest gesture.

It was only when he had married her that Con

realized to the full Peggy's beauty. This, and the charm of companionship with a girl whom intellectually he hardly yet knew, numbed his sense of time. Peggy was in no mood to recall him to hard facts. She dreaded going to Rathcarrig, for she knew well that Con would be regarded by everyone as having thrown himself away on her, and that she would have if only for his sake, to make a big effort, altogether out of keeping with the happy indolence of her mind as they walked the winter roads by day or sat over the turf fire at nights in the pleasant little inn they had so unexpectedly found on their wanderings.

It was the thaw, and the rain it brought, which ultimately recalled them to their senses and back to Rathcarrig.

A whole month passed there. The business of installing a mistress in the tumbledown house of a careless bachelor had been overcome, Con's lack of female relations being largely compensated for by Mary Lalor, who, for the second time, quite naturally it seemed to everybody, took the place of a sister to Con. The dreaded meetings with the neighbours were over, and had left Peggy with a startled sense of pleasure in their unexpected warmth, though Con declared that they could not have behaved otherwise. The Keanes had called, but the "county" had made no move.

Christmas Day came. Con was always busy on Christmas Day, for cows have to be milked, cattle foddered, and sheep tended as carefully on Sundays and Holydays as on others. Con liked to spare his men as much as he could at Christmas time especially, and he undertook each year on Christmas Day a good deal of work which did not as a rule fall to him.

So he went to early Mass with Peggy, and then,

after changing into breeches and strong boots, left her to herself and went out to fork hay to Thady Comyn, who was waiting for him in the haggard with a horse and car.

This done, he sent Thady away, and let himself down off the rick on to the load the herd had "filled." He stretched himself out at full length on the soft hay, his head just protruding over the edge in front, and took up the rope reins. "Gwan ou' o' that," he called to the horse, and they jolted away over the rough road.

As he lay on the top of the load of hay hardly aware of the bumps, up there on his springy perch, he felt the old call of the farm returning to him again in full force, almost overcoming the glamour which had displaced it during the past few months. He was back at work, and the time had come when he must find a way of making his old furiously energetic way of life compatible with his other passion.

"I must talk it out with Peggy," he said to himself as he got down to open the gate where the cattle were congregated in an eager crowd, expectant of his coming.

He worked steadily all day, for he had undertaken more than an ordinary day's work. For the first time since his return he took less than an hour off for his midday meal. Peggy proposed a walk, but he put her off, explaining his Christmas Day obligations.

At last, an hour after the damp December darkness fell on the country, the calves were munching steadily in their warm house, the cows were fed and bedded down, and Con and Spellissey carried the pails of milk up to the dairy.

Con went upstairs with a feeling of pleasant tiredness which he had not experienced since he had left home in September on his holidays. He turned on a

bath and went across to the bedroom he now shared with Peggy.

There was a fire of logs in the grate, and he found Peggy gazing into it rather sadly. Mary Lalor had been invited to share their Christmas dinner, and Peggy had begun to make herself ready, but, on a sudden impulse, she had gone over to the fire, wondering how long Con would remain outside. Her arms and neck were bare and her ankles peeped out from under her white petticoat as she stretched her feet to the fire. Con forgot his re-awakened enthusiasm for his old rough life when he saw her.

"Peggy," said he, "I was going to grouse about the extravagance of fires in bedrooms and all the extra work it means cutting up timber, but indeed a fire is cheap enough when it produces a picture like the one you make in that chair."

There was none of that little suggestion of coquetry, almost of vulgarity, which had jarred on him when he first knew her in her smile now. She had put off that thin veneer when she left Keownstown, as simply as she might have discarded a dress which showed a lack of taste. "You are forgetting," she said, "that I am the beautiful princess and that you are to lay the world at my feet."

"And here I am grudging you a few sticks! But I'm not, really. I wish you would not look so confoundedly alluring. I'm all dirt from the cowhouse and I hardly dare touch you."

"Well, hurry on to your bath," said Peggy, "and then you'll be in time to talk to me for a few minutes before dinner. I hardly set eyes on you all day."

"All right," said Con. He would like to have taken her in his arms and almost hurt her, so strong were the feelings which came over him at such times. But

his sense of humour was not dead. Clean or dirty a man cannot make love when water is running from the tap all the time in the bathroom, and he said nothing, but hurried out of the room with his towel and a clean shirt over his arm.

When he came back he found Peggy fully dressed, looking very dainty and distinguished in her new Irish costume, but no longer surrounded by that intangible and bewitching atmosphere which never failed to enchant Con and set his pulses racing.

"Are your clothes all right, Con?" Peggy inquired.

"I want another stud," said he, "I suppose I must wear a linen collar on this occasion."

"Ah," exclaimed Peggy, "I thought I had remembered everything. It takes a little time, you know, to get acquainted with a man's wardrobe."

"You're pretty good as a valet," he laughed, "I believe you'd find me perfect as a lady's maid."

"You don't know half the things I wear," said Peggy, "and you'd have me shivering."

"Indeed I would not," said Con, parting his hair at the glass.

"Well, thank God," said Peggy, "I'm not the kind of girl that needs a maid."

"Or I a valet—a pretty pair I've had up to this in Lally and Spellissey!"

"I hate Lally," said Peggy, "we really must send her away, she's the dirtiest old thing in the world and won't do anything I tell her."

"She can cook all right," said Con.

"Yes; but if you only knew what you were eating: I'll shew you her pots and pans next Sunday when she is at Mass."

"Don't spoil my appetite, Peggy. I'm just ready for a good meal, I've put in a good stiff day's work."

"And left me to do nothing."

Con looked round sharply from the dressing-table where he was wrestling with his unaccustomed white collar. "Well," he said, "we can't go on love making always, however much we like it." His mood had changed in the last half-hour.

"No, I suppose not," she replied, "but you have only to fall back into your old way of life to find a substitute for love. I have worked all my life, and now, with nothing much to do, I feel bored when you're not with me."

"We must talk this out some time," said Con.

"Why not now?" asked Peggy.

"Sure we've only a few minutes," Con replied, "and just as we were getting at something we would have to go down. Mary will soon be here."

"*Tá go maith*," said Peggy, "but 'tis not like you to dodge things."

"I don't want to, *a ghrádh*. Whisht. I hear wheels on the avenue. That's Mary coming in. I never thought she'd drive and I've no stable settled. I must go and change the old mare out into the outer yard. Damn! I thought I'd finished with stock for this day."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Peggy, "I absolutely forgot to tell you: I met Father Tom this afternoon when I was out in Kiltelly and I asked him to come too. That must be he."

"Well, you're a queer one," said Con, hurriedly putting on his boots again.

Father Hehir, Mary Lalor, Con and Peggy had as pleasant a Christmas dinner that evening as any people could have in a house where there are no children, but it was not until they had gone to the snug sitting-room, which Peggy had contrived out of Con's bare

and inhospitable sanctum, and the men had their pipes going, that they hit upon any subject of conversation of more than a casual kind.

Con told of his day's work, and Peggy said :

" You see, he is neglecting me."

" I agree with you," said Father Tom, " that he had no right to work so hard on Christmas Day. There are plenty of men in Rathcarrig without that. But you must admit, Mrs. O'Hickie, that an active man like your husband must attend to his business. He cannot be always attending on a lady, even so attractive a one as you," he added, with unusual gallantry for a priest.

" I've no part in the scheme of things here. Con won't look on me as a useful human being," said Peggy, half jokingly carrying on in the third person the conversation which had been begun in the bedroom before the arrival of their guests.

" A man can't be in love with a useful human being," said Con, " and I confess I'm still in that foolish state."

" Peggy is just as useful a person as you, Con," said Mary, " and there's plenty of room for two brains here if you are to carry out any of your great plans for the future of Rathcarrig."

" They are dreams, lapsing into the limbo of forgotten things," said Con.

" *Ráiméis !*" said Father Hehir. " Trot out your plans now for criticism."

" Well, they're really Mary's ideas, not mine," said Con, " and any that aren't hers Peggy is responsible for."

" Oh, he means the co-operative society by me," said Mary.

" And the Gaelic League by me, I suppose," said Peggy.

"But these are not confined to Rathcarrig," Father Tom objected.

"I had a sort of idea," said Con, "that something might be done on a place like this—using those two movements as a sort of foundation on which to work. It's all really very vague in my mind. The ideal (which is ridiculously unattainable) is something in the nature of a Gaelic speaking co-operative commonwealth. Such things must begin from something and someone has to make a start. But to tell you the truth it all seems the most abject rubbish once one tries to put it into words."

"Nothing is rubbish which is a genuine attempt to work for the good of the country," said Father Hehir. "Now, let us analyse your ideas by a catechism. First of all the Irish speaking aspect of the question: well, that needs no explanation. Now the co-operative state—the co-operative state," he repeated reflectively.

"We know what co-operation is: a means of knocking down the excessive profits of middlemen. And giving farmers the advantage of combination which every other producing class enjoys," put in Mary.

"Yes, just so," Father Tom continued, "we also know that it does something to break down the mistrust which too often exists among neighbours, and we know what it should be—at least those of us who read our *Homestead* do. All the same I find it hard to connect it with the state. 'Tis so hard to visualise anything but a movement struggling against a hostile government department as ours has become lately."

"But a government of our own would not be hostile," said Con.

"Ah," replied the priest, "that is the question. It is almost incredible how low the standard of public life has fallen."

"The Party is certainly not up to Parnell's standard," Mary said.

"'Tis our own fault," cried Peggy, "the people are so apathetic they elect any tubthumper for member. Then we can hardly complain when our precious politicians spend their time acquiring an English point of view in London, and their spare moments in kow-towing to foreign politicians for jobs for their nephews and aunts."

"My dear Mrs. O'Hickie," said Father Hehir, "I had no idea you held such strong views. To tell you the truth, I partly agree with you; but if a person said publicly what you have just said to us he would be shouted down as a factionist and a traitor to the cause."

"So much the worse for the cause," said Peggy, "We'll never do any good till we've put them out, clear and clean."

"You're a great one for a clean sweep always," remarked Mary, "but once again I can't go all the way with you. I am not a blind supporter of Mr. Redmond like most people in the country, but I do see that the Party has done a lot of material good, and I think we should trust them to see us through the final stages."

"The final stage will never come as long as we leave things in their hands," said Peggy.

"We'll see," said Father Hehir. "There will soon be a General Election and Home Rule is almost bound to follow if the Liberals get back, as they probably will."

"Well, I say don't trust any English politician, or Irish one, either, for that matter," said Peggy, getting up to put more turf on the fire.

"We have drifted a long way from the Gaelic-speaking co-operative state," Mary reminded them.

"We have," said Father Hehir, "but still we have not been so far from the point after all; for it seems to me to resolve itself into this: is anything in the nature of a co-operative state compatible with our present system of government—even if we had one of our own."

"We want a kind of communal system in this country, I think," said Con.

"You are dangerously near to being a socialist, I believe," Father Tom complained. "God preserve us from socialism, whatever comes."

"Why?"

Father Hehir gave expression to some of the current objections to that crude form of injustice which passes with uninformed people as socialism, but Mary interrupted his platitudes, saying:

"You're as bad as the politicians Peggy has her knife into. You are assuming that we must adopt an undigested kind of British socialism when we have our own Brehon system readymade to go back to."

"From what I know of the Brehon Laws they were anything but socialism," said the priest.

"Well, they were to some extent communist," Mary insisted.

"You are getting into a dispute," said Con, "on a mere matter of terminology. The upshot of this conversation for me is that I will get a book on the Brehon Laws, if there is one, I confess that they are a mere name to me and no more."

"When you have read it up we will construct our new state out of the ruins of the tenth century," said Mary. "Meanwhile what can be done here?"

"We already have a fairly good co-op., and the Irish class keeps alive, small as it is," Father Hehir said.

"Let's start an industry," said Peggy suddenly.

They all laughed. "You cannot start an industry to order," said Mary, "as you could start a hurling club."

"It seems to me," Con began after a pause, "that an industry should arise naturally in a place because a local demand exists for some product."

"It seems obvious enough when you put it that way," said Father Hehir, "but it never struck me before. I've read so much in the *Leader* about the necessity for reviving Irish industry that I had almost come to think it the duty of every village to set up a factory of some kind without further delay."

"I'm not sure that it's not," said Mary. "Creameries are factories, for instance, and they're growing up in County Limerick all over the place. Even taking Con's axiom as a guide, it would not be hard for every village to have its industry. Every district has its raw material. Cattle, sheep and corn; why, those three words alone suggest at once tanneries, woollen mills, corn mills, and twenty other things."

"What's that!" exclaimed Father Tom.

"And," continued Mary, "if we talk of local demand, there is a demand for lime and for cement and chairs and tables and a dozen things, as well as leather and cloth and flour."

"You force us to the conclusion that we ought start not one industry but a hundred," said Con.

"The only objection I can see," Father Tom remarked, "is that in everything you mention we would have to face foreign competition and cheap stuff coming in all the time to knock us out."

"That's a fact," said Con, "though I don't know that it applies to the whole list. It's so comprehensive that I can't remember all its items. But there's one point we've all overlooked, and that is, that to start one little industry, much less a hundred big ones, you want capital."

"I forgot that for the moment," said Father Hehir.

"Like the amateur architect who forgot the stairs in his house," said Mary. "Anyway," she added, "capital shouldn't matter in Con's communal anti-capitalist state."

"Your state, not mine," said Con.

"Well, all our states, if you like; but, seriously, we might go as far as to extend the society a little and produce something as well as being mere buyers and sellers as we are now."

"There's not enough cows for a creamery," said Father Hehir.

"We want something more original," said Mary.

"I've been trying to remember your list," said Con, "we could start a limekiln with advantage."

"We could," they agreed.

"Very well," said Peggy with sudden decision, "that's what I'll do with my fortune."

"But that wouldn't be a co-operative lime kiln," said Mary.

"Then we must at least make it a Gaelic-speaking lime kiln," said Father Tom, bursting into a roar of laughter.

After they had gone Con and Peggy sat over the remnants of the fire. Peggy raked together the *griosach* with the poker till they glowed red again.

"There's no need for that talk we threatened ourselves with, after all," said Con when they had spoken for a while of their friends, who had driven back to Killeely together.

"Why?" said Peggy.

"Because we can work together to build up a new industrialism free from the horrors of British and American commercialism, with all its poverty and slums and sordidness. Rathcarrig shall be the birth-place of the new Irish godly industrialism."

Peggy laughed at him with her pleasant voice :

"Such a mouthful of isms," she said. "You're a woful enthusiast. Optimism is the ism most suitable to you. But anyway we'll use my five hundred pounds to start a proper lime kiln if you like. Though you think me so contemptible as a farmer I can see that there's good limestone in the place."

"Well, we'll get it analysed and see," said Con. "We'll go tomorrow morning and knock off some chips of stone to send to Dublin. And now what about bed?"

"To dream of Rathcarrig as a garden city, each man with his cow and a share of the profits of the mills and works. Is that it?"

"I fancy I'm more likely to dream of that new leak in the roof," said he.

"And I of Lally and her misdoings," said Peggy, as they went up the dark and draughty staircase.

CHAPTER XXIII

Con's interest in politics had hitherto been very small. The two organizations he belonged to were both officially non-political, and both included members of very divergent political opinions. He already felt a desire, as might have been expected from a young man in his position, to work for his country ; but the more he saw of Irish politics the less did he feel impelled to adopt it as a medium for the service he wished to render. But an event soon occurred which, though only of local importance, so angered him that it changed his whole outlook on the question.

The general election came soon after Christmas. The sitting member for the constituency which included Kiltelly did not seek re-election, and the convention which was summoned at Keownstown to select a new candidate had actually chosen Peter Paul Vahey. In other words, Peter Paul Vahey was now their member of parliament, for, since the acrimony of the Parnell split had subsided, there had been no contested election in the Keownstown division, and selection by the Nationalist convention was tantamount to election by the constituency.

Peter Paul's sudden emergence from obscurity took Con's breath away somewhat, while it roused the indignation of his friends, Mary Lalor and Father Hehir—the priest stoutly affirming that the convention had been “ rigged.”

But they only shrugged their shoulders and let it go at that, returning to their usual avocations after giving vent in private to some vigorous but futile protests. It was Peggy who really took it to heart, and it was Peggy who convinced Con that this evil was being allowed to go too far.

" 'Tis intolerable," she said. " I look on it as an insult to Ireland that her welfare should be handed over to such rabble. I'll never be satisfied until I see that mean little fellow put back in his place. The people must be made to see that such jobbery will end in destruction."

" What can we do ? " said Con.

" I wish to heaven we'd known in time and we'd have put up a good man to oppose the little beast," said Peggy savagely.

Once in, of course, the new member of parliament was a fixture. No violent change of public opinion, much less the disgust of a mere handful of intelligent men and women, could dislodge him. Only death or another general election could do it.

Nevertheless, the four friends when they foregathered often discussed the situation, debating what might have been done to avert the degradation of being represented by P. P. Vahey, M.P.—a degradation bad enough in its local aspect, but disastrous, in their view, when regarded as a fair example of the condition of the whole country.

They were hard put to it to agree on any individual as coming up to the standard they required and at the same time being a competent man of affairs. All the local " men of affairs " were unimpeachable Party men, and they were reluctantly compelled to admit that their standard bearer must of necessity have been an outsider, not a local man,

"Anyway, we're too late : 'tis all a case now," they would always say, after which their talk would turn to questions of more immediate interest.

But Peggy, who was far more concerned than the others and who really took Peter Paul's election to heart as if it had been an insult to herself, did not let the matter lie so complacently. Her insistence was the cause of the first real quarrel between Con and herself.

After supper they always went to the "sanctum," and, as it was Friday night, Con only waited to light his pipe before going over to the desk to attack the weekly task of making up the men's pay sheet. Peggy happened to be in a communicative frame of mind, and the sight of Con scribbling calculations of the value of a quarter-day's work or totting and re-totting columns of recalcitrant figures, puffing at a pipe more often out than alight, and answering her remarks, sometimes with a monosyllable and sometimes with a mere grimace, provoked the element of contrariety in her and made her almost garrulous.

"Look here, Peggy," he said at last, "I'll never get this job done if you don't hold your whisht a while."

"Why do it at all?" she asked.

"I must do it," he said, for the idea of not doing it had never occurred to him.

"Well, do it to-morrow then,"

"But I wouldn't have time to get it done before the bank closes, as well as all the ordinary things to be got through," he objected.

"You're a man who makes work," she declared.

Con resumed his tots, but Peggy returned to the attack :

"You could do that wages book on Friday afternoons," she said. "Then you would be able to spend the evenings like a reasonable human being."

"Oh, damn it," said Con, "I'll get up and do it at five o'clock to-morrow morning ; now are you satisfied ? "

"I will be, as soon as I see you sitting in that chair and your pipe lighting again. You'll kill yourself if you work all day on the farm and do office work every night. 'Tis worse you're getting."

"Oh, all right," said Con, "let's talk about something else."

"That smalmy Peter Paul has got on my mind," Peggy began.

"I'm sick of the mention of his name," snapped Con.

"My dear old boy, you're as cross as a four year old bull."

"Well, I'll try and be a good boy, but Vahey is a bee in your bonnet."

"He is, surely. I wish you felt the same way as I do about it."

"I think I do really, only I'm not in such a cuffuffle about it."

Peggy laughed pleasantly. "Well, perhaps I'm too much annoyed over it. Only I don't want us to be caught napping if ever another election should chance to come. 'Twould never do to let him in so easy again."

"There'll be no election for years," said Con, "why would there be ? "

"Anyway we should be prepared," said Peggy.

"What can we do ? " said he. "After all the talk we've had, we've not hit on a man to go against him."

"I have," said Peggy, a note of excitement in her voice.

"Who ? " he inquired with mild interest.

"You," she replied.

Con sat up straight in his chair and gasped. "Don't be coddling me," he said.

"I'm not."

"Then all I can say is this," he went on, "unless you want to make a public fool of me, don't be talking like that."

"I'm quite serious," she replied. "Unless I was, I wouldn't propose it. You're just the man really: you have brains, what hardly any of the pack we're up against have, more especially that Peter Paul. The people like you, I know, and, what's more, they know you're honest."

"I wish you wouldn't talk rot," Con said.

Peggy ignored his protest and continued: "Just think what a programme we could set up against their miserable old cry of 'Home Rule if you wait patiently' and 'trust us' or 'trust Asquith' or 'trust democracy' or trust something or other. We'll make bits of their old cant about union of hearts—backed up by free porter and old age pensions! It's the people's money all the time, not theirs, and as for their old age pensions we'll soon show the electors that it was not the Irish members got them for the poor but the English working man."

"Stop, stop," cried Con. "I tell you politics is not in my line. Can't you give me a bit of peace?"

"Not till I've finished our programme. If you win, you won't have to leave Rathcarrig, for one of our planks will be the boycotting of the British Parliament. . . ."

Con broke in abruptly: "I'm going back to my work," he said.

"Ah don't," she said, "I've not half told you what we could do."

Con got up and went towards the desk.

"Oh! very well," said Peggy, pouting, and she went to the bookshelf for a book. She made no serious attempt to read the novel she had taken down at random, for she felt she had a genuine grievance; not, it must be admitted, without some cause. She looked at Con, again absorbed in his task, and her quick temper rose. She made a remark which he ignored. She felt the hot blood mounting to her cheeks: "You're a perfect beast, Con, sometimes," she said in a level voice, and a moment later she went out of the room.

Con threw down his pen with a despairing gesture: "What have I done now?" he said aloud.

He opened the door and looked out into the dark passage. He shut it again, and began to walk up and down the room with his hands in his pockets, an almost comical look of dismayed contrition on his face.

He closed the wages book with a bang and went over to the fire and moodily shifted the burning logs with his foot.

For half-an-hour he remained where he was, smoking moodily.

"The fact is," he said at length, "I am a beast and Peggy's right." With that he blew out the light and went upstairs. The bedroom was in darkness, and Peggy was apparently fast asleep, her head almost buried in the bedclothes. Con looked at her, candle in hand. He noticed that she had put a ribbon in her hair as usual, and somehow this made him feel very miserable. Trivial detail though it was, it reminded him that they had actually fallen out—he and his beloved Peggy. "It was certainly all my fault," he said, unconsciously speaking in an audible whisper.

He got into bed and blew out the candle. But sleep was impossible. He did not even attempt to woo it.

He moved about restlessly from side to side, the ungraciousness of his manner during the evening becoming magnified, as time passed, into a crime of infinite proportions.

But Peggy was not asleep. She had heard his muttered remark when he came in, and she listened with rapidly diminishing hostility to the rustling of his bedclothes as he tossed about. After a time she said, in as matter of fact a voice as she could assume :

“ You don’t seem to be able to go to sleep.”

“ How could I ? ” cried Con, “ when I’ve been a brute to you ? ”

In the terms of peace Peggy was generous, for she declared she would not press her point. Whether it was deliberate or not, she could have adopted no better method of winning Con to her way of thinking.

CHAPTER XXIV

By degrees Con and Peggy accommodated themselves to each other's idiosyncracies, and after a year of marriage they had settled down amicably to a life which both found very pleasant. Con recast his routine to some extent, so that more evenings were given to reading and talking and less to the day's work. Peggy found an outlet for her energies in the dairy and the poultry, which she rescued from the chaos of Lally's superseded régime, and in working with Mary Lalor to make the Gaelic League a more vital element in the life of the place. Moreover, the foundation of the Gaelic-speaking co-operative commonwealth had been laid by the building of the lime kiln, though, as they had to admit, it was but a poor beginning, since it was Peggy's own money which built it, and the lime burner was an Orangeman from Newtownards who regarded the Irish language as a piece of Papist lunacy : but at least it was a start in the right direction. Twelve months had evolved without effort, the *modus vivendi* of which they had felt the need the Christmas before, and the continued absence of any sign of recognition of their existence by society did nothing to mar the success of their joint venture in life.

Peggy did not eschew her absorption in the affairs of the State as a result of the misunderstanding it had once produced between her and Con. She talked much and often of Ireland and her hopes for the

future, but she was careful to choose her time more suitably, and Con, for his part, became increasingly interested in public affairs ; and, as he grew to understand her point of view better, he was the more impressed by her sincerity, which he no longer regarded as girlish fanaticism, even if he was sometimes amused at the boundlessness of her enthusiasm. So much, indeed, did she influence him that, after a mental struggle which made him exceedingly uncomfortable while it lasted, he decided that he could not conscientiously refuse to accept the view, which gained weight when she no longer pressed it, that it was his plain duty to oppose Peter Paul Vahey at the next election. He comforted himself, when he thought with horror of all it entailed, by reflecting that another general election could hardly take place for several years.

Nothing he could have done could have endeared him to Peggy so much as this decision, and she let him see it.

Though Con found consolation in the thought that the ordeal to which he had condemned himself by this resolution was at least remote, he was deprived of even the poor satisfaction this gave him when the sudden announcement appeared in the papers that another general election was to be precipitated by the dispute in England over the Peers' veto.

Questions unconnected with Ireland cause, by reason of the union of two wholly dissimilar countries, a general election in Ireland whenever one takes place in England ; and in the same way Irish affairs have driven more than one British government to appeal to the electorate whose confidence it possessed on all questions of domestic interest. The second election of 1910 certainly had an Irish aspect as well as a

British ; but, while it was the occasion of the fiercest party strife in Great Britain, where new issues had to be fought out, it meant in the greater part of Ireland nothing more than the automatic re-election of members pledged to party discipline and to the winning of the same long-striven-for end which two generations of representatives had been returned to secure.

The task which Con had set himself was one of extreme difficulty. It could be at the best, even if successful, little more than a protest, a first beginning on the road which he hoped the country might some day choose. Primarily he was against Peter Paul Vahey and all he stood for ; and to that extent he was at one with the handful of dissentients who were standing out in the Cork constituencies against the prevailing decadence. But these he counted only as parliamentarians at war with the personnel and with the details of a system, whereas the views he held, which he had imbibed from Peggy, and, to a lesser extent, from Father Hehir and Mary Lalor, went far deeper than a mere protest against the abuses into which the Party had fallen. He was for a reconstitution of Irish life upon a new basis, an Irish basis ; he would advocate drastic steps requiring individual effort on the part of the supporters of his policy : a clean sweep of the old accepted ideas and the substitution of a complete revolution of thought in the country.

The sudden imminence of the election blew all hesitation to the winds. If he was to carry out his intention he must act quickly, and the very day on which the news became known he sent word to Father Hehir and Mary Lalor to come to Rathcarrig that night, to draw up a plan of campaign for the approaching fight.

Less than five minutes discussion sufficed to make it clear to them that the task they proposed to undertake was an exceedingly formidable one. Con did not see his way to join William O'Brien's heterogeneous party and thus secure the co-operation of a definite political organization ; the others, sharing his dislike for all the existing parties, did not press him on the point.

"We will have to depend on ourselves alone," said Father Hehir.

"Undoubtedly," said Con, whose mind had been galvanized into activity and at the same time relieved of the tortures of suspense. "Let us sum up the situation. Firstly in view of the fact that we are up against a strong organization, against the man in possession, and also against a man who has a whole ramification of family connections throughout the constituency. Am I to go on at all, or is it too hopeless?"

"Hopeless or not, you ought go," said Peggy.

"Agreed," said Mary and the priest together.

"Very well," continued Con, "I'm not in the least anxious to back out, but I wanted to be sure of you all on the main point first. A single faint heart would be enough to discourage me, but when there are none amongst us I am all enthusiasm for the fray. Now to consider what it means. None of us know much about electioneering, I think."

They admitted this.

"Nor have we been nursing the constituency. I doubt if a single voter ever dreams that there will be a contest at all. We have therefore to begin from the very beginning, and we have only a few weeks to do what is really a work of months or years. I have been turning over in my own mind to-day what ought to be done ; but first of all let's hear what each of you has to suggest. Begin you, Father Tom."

"It is hard to gather one's wits at a moment's notice," said he. "However, we must formulate clearly the main planks of our platform. An election address has to be prepared, and I daresay the best way to crystallize our ideas will be by drawing it up at once. It can be revised again, of course. We must then map out a series of public meetings, which means in actual fact considering in what places of importance in the constituency we have friends enough to organize meetings, for of course we can hardly just go to places without having anyone from the locality at least to take the chair. The other matter to which we must give our attention is canvassing."

He paused and Mary said: "You two had better leave Kiltelly to me and Peggy. We can also do Keownstown. That will leave you and Father Tom free to spend your time going about the other side of the constituency, interviewing people for the next few days. Peter Paul's family pull is mostly hereabouts, of course. I daresay you will be agreeably surprised how little is thought of him in other parts."

"This family connection business," said Father Hehir, "may be worth a good deal to him. I'm afraid it is. But there is another side to it too: every clan and family clique like that has enemies, and they will be on our side, not through love of us, but from spite of the Vaheys and their following."

"I have no clan," said Con, "but we have the Folanés at Keownstown."

"We have," said Peggy, "but I greatly fear we are too quiet a crowd to do much good."

"All the fire of the family must have gone into you," said Father Hehir, laughing, "quiet and all as you are this evening."

" 'Tis not want of enthusiasm makes Peggy quiet, I'm sure," said Mary.

" No," replied Peggy, " I was thinking."

" Well ? "

" Oh ! like the rest of you my ideas are a bit *trí na chéile* as yet. But one thing I see clearly : we must work the Gaelic for all we're worth in the native-speaking parts in the west. Would you be able for making a speech in Irish, Con ? " she asked him.

" I don't feel able for making a speech in English or Irish," said Con ruefully ; " but I daresay I could learn one by heart, only my *blas* is so bad."

" 'Tis not so bad at all," said Peggy.

" You needn't be one bit worried over the speechifying part of the business," said Father Hehir, with the easy confidence of a natural orator who has constant practice in his art.

" 'Tis easy for you talk," said Con.

" Sermons and political speeches are two different things," said the priest, " but you did well enough that day in Kiltelly long 'go ; and as to platform speaking you have to say practically the same thing every place you go, so that after a day or two 'tis as simple as praying."

" A bad simile that, to give a layman," said Con. " But it looks to me as if we had better make a beginning with our election addresses. I suppose all our speeches will be no more than ringing the changes on various items in it."

" How will we begin ? " Mary said.

" Destructive or constructive ? " queried Con.

" Oh, destructive first," said Father Tom. " All write down on a piece of paper the objections we have to P. P. V. and his party, and between the four of us we'll have concocted a pretty damning indictment.

Then out of the wreckage we can prepare a constructive policy."

"Get some paper, Peggy," said Mary as excited as a child playing a new game.

They set to work, and after an hour or two they agreed upon the heads of the election address. Con was then left to word it; and at length, long after Peggy had gone to bed and the fire had burnt itself out, he finally produced the following:

"FELLOW COUNTRYMEN AND ELECTORS OF KEOWNS-TOWN DIVISION:—

"I appeal to you as Irishmen to support a candidate who puts Ireland first and England second.

"Your present representative and the party of which he is a member have ceased to be really Irish. They are not merely in alliance with the British Liberal Party, they have actually become part of it. They have been made fools of by clever English politicians, who use them as pawns in their own party game. They had their chance after the last election to make their power felt. They failed and they will fail again. They have departed from the independence which was the true strength of the Irish Party under Parnell. They have broken the spirit, if not the letter, of their pledges by slavishly seeking offices for their friends and relations. They have driven out from their ranks any man who has dared to lift his voice against their autocratic edicts. Irishmen, remember last year's Convention and *down with the tyranny of the Belfast batons*.

"Every man you send to Westminster is another added to the awful yearly toll of emigrants; for Westminster turns Irishmen into West Britons with English ideas, an English point of view, and as often

as not English homes. Are the men of Keownstown, of Kiltelly and the rest of you satisfied to be represented by hyphenated Englishmen? I do not think so.

"The policy I put forward is a return to the independence of Parnell's day; and I go further and say this: if Irish members cannot immediately secure from the party in power in England not a pledge but an act, let them secede in a body and return to Ireland. The duly elected representatives of the Irish people, sitting in assembly in Dublin, would do more to bring home to the British people and the world at large the claim and the rights of Ireland than a century of subservient talk in a foreign parliament. The English people and the English Government fear drastic action. Nothing but fierce activity can win anything from them, as you who have in the past won some grudging concessions by these means know well. Irishmen have suffered for their country in the past: we must be prepared to suffer imprisonment and even death again. Thus will a policy of boycotting Westminster and making government impossible in Ireland by passive (and even some forms of active) resistance win at last the freedom so long the goal of our forefathers. The British Empire is omnipotent now, but world politics cannot always remain unchanged. All that we can do, if the Liberal Party will not concede the Irish demand.

"What should that Irish demand be? Not a paltry Councils Bill such as you were asked to accept by the party which now seeks again your confidence. You gave them your answer then. Give them a final answer now. Ireland must crave no miserable gas and water Home Rule. No half measure circumscribed by financial restrictions and impossible safeguards.

It is an outrage to our intelligence to suggest that a country like ours needs to be bolstered up with English money ; and it is a libel on our character to say that elaborate precautions are necessary to protect the Protestant population from our revenge. Ireland is by inalienable right of ages a sovereign nation and as such can demand, at the very least, *no less than unconditional Repeal of the Union*. Let us not forget that the English parliament itself passed an Act, amounting to a solemn treaty with this country, denying the right of Great Britain to legislate for Ireland then or at any future time. That was eighteen years before the Union : we cannot, in face of that, demand anything less than Repeal of the Union.

“ Repeal, with the reforms of the last century—Catholic Emancipation, popular franchise, etc., etc.—incorporated in the constitution means freedom for Ireland. Home Rule means a mere prolongation of the fight for our full rights.

“ Our opponents themselves admit that England’s settled policy has been to ruin Irish industries. Yet they would accept a Bill which perpetuates England’s power to do this. Repeal means that we will have the final control of our own industrial policy ; that we can again foster the prosperity which Ireland enjoyed under Grattan’s Parliament and lost under the Union.

“ Repeal means an Irish House of Lords. What better safeguard could Protestants and landlords want than this ? I and my friends believe in the policy of live and let live. As Parnell said, Ireland cannot afford to lose a single one of her sons. Repeal offers a place to all classes in Ireland. What place does the present Irish Party offer to any but their own obedient time servers ?

“And, lastly, Fellow Countrymen, our beloved language. England’s policy, through the so-called National Schools, has been to destroy it. She has well nigh succeeded. What value does the present ‘Irish’ party set on it? None whatever, with one or two honourable exceptions. The Irish language is the life blood of the Irish nation. Do not support a party which does not foster it as a national heritage.

“I ask your support then for an Irish policy for Ireland and against the growing danger of an English policy for Ireland. The issue can be stated in eight words :

“Ireland A Nation Or West Britain A Province.”

“Splendid,” said Father Hehir and Mary, who came again to Rathcarrig the next night to criticize Con’s excursion into political literature.

“But,” continued Mary, “it’s too long and it’s much too literary : we must tone it down for the electors. Remember who they are for the most part : not Father Tom and me, but Mick Kennedy , Jerry-Ned, and people like that.’

“True for you,” said Father Tom.

“For instance,” Mary went on, glancing over the sheets of manuscript which Con had handed her, “who ever heard of ‘autooratic edicts’ in these parts? ‘Hyphenated,’ too is a word which would not mean anything to them,”

“That doesn’t matter,” said Con, “it’s only an adjective qualifying ‘Englishmen,’ and will seem like something awful, like O’Connell’s parrallelogram.”

Nevertheless the phrase was rejected by a majority, and Mary continued her critical analysis : “‘Drastic actions’ is a poor phrase, I think : let me see, try ‘strong and determined action,’ and ‘perpetuate.’ and

‘prolongation’ are unnecessarily long words. I don’t think I’ve anything else to say on a first reading, except that you should tone down some of the insulting things you’ve said of the Party. You can say what you like in a speech, but a certain reserve is desirable in an election address which will appear in print. You can’t plead inaccurate reporting in a printed document, when your words are torn to pieces by the other side ; for of course they will make a mountain out of a mole hill wherever they can pin you down to some overstatement.”

“All right,” said Con, “I adopt your amendments. Now, Father Tom, your turn for suggestions. Peggy has said her say while the immortal document was in process of production.”

“I’ve not much to add to Miss Lalor’s remarks,” said Father Hehir. “There’s one thing, however : you should mention all the towns in the constituency if you mention Keownstown and Kiltelly ; and I’d leave out your reference to dying for Ireland. It will only frighten people, and you will be called a revolutionary and an anarchist and all the rest. We have to remember that this address is first and foremost to catch votes.”

Con demurred, and Peggy took up the cudgels in defence of the phrases to which Father Hehir objected.

“They are hers,” Con explained, “But I put them in as a free agent,” he added.

Mary agreed with Father Hehir, and it was only after a long discussion, leading by its very nature into innumerable by-paths of the whole question at issue in the election, that a compromise satisfactory to all was agreed upon.

“We’ll get it printed at once as it now stands,” said Con at length, “and now to organize details of our campaign. . . .”

CHAPTER XXV

Con, accompanied as a rule by Father Hehir, spent several days on the road, covering such long distances each day that he was obliged to discard his over-tired mare and hire a motor car, though they had previously decided that this would be too great a burden on the slender funds at their command. The difficulties they had to face, while they traversed the wide tracts of country included in the Keownstown division, became more apparent every day as each friend they met raised some fresh point for their consideration and decision. The long period which had elapsed since the last contested election and the apathy of the electors had left the register incomplete and full of anomalies. Willing workers had to be found, some to analyse voters' lists, others to canvass the various parishes where they would require accurate information as to who had a vote and who had not; a programme had to be arranged for a series of public meetings in different centres, no easy itinerary to determine, where the only suitable days were Sundays and each of the local committees they succeeded in forming wanted their meeting at almost the same hour.

Con worked with a frenzied energy, in comparison with which his ordinary vigorous activity at Rathcarrig was indolence. He developed a capacity for making quick and determined decisions which surprised himself and perhaps impressed his supporters as much as the policy he advocated. Though he was quick and decisive in action and organization he was

as yet slow in expressing his ideas, but here Father Hehir's natural gift of speech made up for his deficiencies, and together they made a persuasive combination wherever they could get together men sufficiently intelligent or disgruntled to listen to what their opponents were already deriding as factious lunacy and harebrained treachery to the "Old Cause."

Having at their disposal so few speakers they were obliged to depend for the most part on canvassing as their chief weapon in their attack upon the stronghold they were audacious enough to assail. The most they could do was to arrange for one public meeting in each town or village of any importance, and this could only be accomplished by an almost indecent race from place to place on the few Sundays available before the polling day.

Despite the frequent rebuffs he had met with on his preliminary expedition, more especially when Father Hehir had not been with him, Con returned to Rathcarrig in good spirits. The excitement of the fray was upon him, and no matter what discouragement he received or what evidence of the futility of his action was put before him he could not be despondent. When he reached home he found Mary and Peggy busily dissecting a voters' list which they had obtained. Like him they were victims to the fascination of fighting an uphill fight, and like him they were giving themselves little rest from the enormous exertions it involved.

"How did you get on?" they cried, as Con went into the "Sanctum." By tacit consent the ordinary greetings were omitted.

"I never knew," Con replied, "that there were so many honest men in the country or so many mean blackguards."

"Tell us your story," said Peggy.

"I wish to heaven," Con said, "that there were more Gaelic League branches in these parts. Wherever I met one I met friends. We came across very few people who will be any use except as canvassers, but we have a small army of them set in motion, thanks to Father Tom."

He went on to tell them in detail of the hopes he entertained of each of the places they had visited, and of the arrangements that had been made for Sunday public meetings.

"You've told us all about the satisfactory people," said Mary. "What about the mean blackguards you spoke of?"

"Oh, them," said Con. "I was not referring to our mud-slinging opponents. You saw the article in the *Border Gazette*, I suppose? No, I was thinking of the miserable lick-spittlers who promised to support us, obviously not because they cared a damn for our ideas, but because of their own rotten spleen over a job they failed to get, and so on. We must put up with them, I suppose, as Father Tom kept reminding me when I was inclined—as I suppose I was—to be nasty with them. A vote is a vote, and in election-eering the end justifies the means: a dangerous doctrine, rather, I fancy. What have you done?"

They explained that they had thought it better that he should do the house to house canvassing as far as possible in person in the Kilteely district where he had more friends and more enemies than elsewhere, and where they thought that there was a better chance of winning over doubtful people and even open opponents by personal influence. So they had devoted themselves to the necessary drudgery of working on the voters' lists.

"We've had a talk," said Mary, "to one or two people we knew would be on our side, such as Jerry-Ned above. And Peggy went to Keownstown to get her brother moving."

"You must come and help me put life into Brian to-morrow," said Peggy, "he's not half anxious enough to please me."

"And you must go to Gortroe side at once," exclaimed Mary. "'Tis the weakest spot in the two parishes."

"Well," said Con, "whatever about them, they must wait: I have to go over the other side of the mountains to-morrow. We've not touched that part yet. And that confounded motor is inclined to kick up on me. Tom Walsh—you know the man we met at Lahinch last year—insisted that the driver was in the pay of the other side. If you heard the banging and puffing the old motor made on the road you'd believe him. Anyway, it will have to go eighty miles to-morrow."

"Will you come to Keownstown on Monday?" asked Peggy.

"I don't know," said Con, "until I've had something to eat. I've had nothing as far as I can remember since breakfast."

Peggy was all contrition for her unprecedented lack of care for his comfort. In a wonderfully short space of time, however, he was sitting down to a meal of eggs and soda cake, with quince jam following, and tea, biting hot, for drink.

"I'll not talk another word to-night about this cursed election," said Con, when he had finished. "I'll make out the pay-sheet for Spellissey and write a few letters and then I'll go to bed."

The next day was Saturday, and after a hasty talk

with Spellissey, Tim MacDwyer and Thady Comyn about the work of the farm, which he carried on without referring to the election, Con started off in the unwilling motor to complete his round of the constituency. Sunday was devoted to the first of his public meetings, and the ordeal which these meant to a man who had shrunk in agony from addressing a friendly audience in Killeely, on the occasion of the formation of the Gaelic League branch there, can easily be imagined. But he got through it somehow, helped as much by the noisy element of opposition he met in each of the crowds he addressed as by the simplicity of the issue he had to put before them. He had little time to work himself into a condition of nervous apprehension in the present circumstances: he lived now in a state of perpetual excitement, and this invested him with a sense of reckless indifference which he could not have attained in cold blood.

So it was not until after his first trial as a political speaker on a public platform that he was able to devote a steady week's work with Peggy and Mary to making a personal canvass in the immediate vicinity of Rathcarrig. The motor was dismissed in favour of another, more amenable to wear the blue and orange which had been adopted as his political colours, and, during the interval of waiting for the new car, the yellow mare was again requisitioned to bring them on their round of canvassing.

"We really have him to help us here at last," said Peggy, as they picked up Mary Lalor in Killeely, "you see I have given in and agreed to start with Gortroe."

"I'm glad you've that much sense," said Mary.

"Shew me the list you've made out," said Con.
"We hardly need go near Dick Keane, I suppose."

He's sure to vote right even though he is a Unionist. Who's the first ? ”

“ Andrew MacCormack, of Carhugorey,” announced Mary.

Andrew proved to be a tall, sinewy farmer of the old school, with black side-whiskers turning grey, hard weather-beaten face, and rather watery grey eyes. They caught sight of him as they walked up the bohieren to his low, thatched house. He was carrying a big bundle of hay across the field. Though he could not but have seen them he proceeded to distribute the bundle of hay in small heaps on the ground for the expectant little cattle before he shewed any sign of recognizing their presence on his land. Then he turned back to meet them.

“ Good morning to ye,” he said, politely enough, at the same time lifting his black parson's hat in deference to the ladies. “ Maybe 'tis canvassing ye are. I hear there's to be an election shortly. 'Tis a quare thing, Miss Mary, if I may make so bold as to say so, to see you at such work.”

“ Why not, Andy ? ” said Mary with a laugh. “ We want you to promise your vote to Mr. O'Hickie.”

“ 'Tis not easy do that,” said Andy, laconically.

“ 'Tis easy to vote for an honest man that has a stake in the country,” said Mary.

“ It would be, if there was no one agin him,” said Andy.

“ Sure, someone must be beaten,” said Mary, “ and we must put in the best man this time.”

“ How do I know he's the best man ? ” asked the old man.

“ Don't you know well he is.”

“ How would I know that, and he only in the place a couple of years.”

"I'm here over five years now," Con remarked.

"Yerra, what's five years," scoffed Andy McCormack.

"Five years is enough for a man to prove himself better than a pack of job-hunting, good-for-nothing *púca paidhil* without a ha'porth in the world but what they pick up by their wits," said Peggy hotly.

"I've no reason to think bad of Peter Paul, Miss," Andy replied coolly, "for 'tis him you're alluding to, I suppose. He comes of decent people, and no one can blame a man for looking after his own interest first and foremost."

"I guarantee to look after the interests of the people first," said Con, "and leave my own to look after themselves."

"'Tis an easy thing to be talking," said Andy; "but tell me this now," he added with sudden unexpected insight, "how can you look after my interests beyond in Rathcarrig, for I seen by the notices you have stuck up every place around that you don't hold with going to Parliament at all."

Con hastened to explain the conditional nature of this part of his programme, but Andy was not easy to move from any idea which had become fixed in his mind.

"'Tis a thing I don't like at all," he said, "an unheard-of thing entirely."

Con tried a new line of attack. "After all," he said, "what good have the Irish Party ever done you; they've landed you with extra taxation by voting for a bad budget last year, that's all."

"Don't mind the taxes the likes of me pays: they're harmless! 'Twas the Irish Party won the land for us."

"It wasn't the present Irish Party," said Con, "'twas chiefly the farmers themselves backed up by

an honest party under Parnell, who scorned English flattery and were proof against English bribes."

"Musha, maybe 'tis true for you, Mr. O'Hickie, but all the same for that I'm not sure that Mr. Redmond and his men won't be able to do as much for me and my equals as yourself would."

"Well, I tell you those men have forgotten the decay of Irish nationality," said Con, beginning to feel hopeless of this, his first case.

"Yerra, take your nationality to Hong Kong. How much a head will all the nationality in the world put on to the price of them bullocks beyond. The divil a fardin I tell you. We want a chance to live, and no more; and the man that helps us to do that is the man for me."

Seeing that Con was now getting out of his depth, Mary, as an old friend of Andy's, tried to reason with him. But the most she could get out of him was a promise to think it over.

"Twenty minutes gone and our first fish lost," said Peggy, philosophically looking at her watch.

"Nothing would get him," Mary remarked. "I'm afraid we'll meet a lot more like him. By the way, Peggy," she added, "do you know, I think you should hold yourself in a bit and not flare up too much whatever people say. Old MacCormack didn't like to hear Peter Paul attacked so vigorously."

"I admit I was hasty," said Peggy, "but I didn't attack him personally, though I half think I had a right to."

"Anyway, he took it so," said Con. "Where next?"

They walked over the fields to another house similar to Andy MacCormack's. An older man, not unlike him, met them with more cordiality.

They asked for his vote.

" 'Tis no harm to tell you the truth," said he. " My vote is promised already. 'Twasn't in me to refuse me vote to me own second cousin, whatever I may be thinking about the rights of the case."

They knew that appeals would be useless here, and they moved away towards the third house of the group.

" Blank No. 2," said Con.

They went to the door of the house, a poorer one than the others, roofed with galvanized iron, unpainted and already rusty. Con looked over the half-door, and in the dim light within he saw an ancient woman, sitting beside the hearth. Another woman, old of face for all her comparative youth, was busying herself about the room, in which a number of children were squabbling over a crust, and a hen or two was foraging on the damp, mud floor for pickings.

" Is himself at home ? " Con asked, thinking of the contrast between this house and the comfortable houses of the stronger farmers of the valley.

" He is not, sir," replied the younger woman, going over to the door. " Won't you come inside while I call him. Maybe you're come from the Department about that matter of . . . "

" I am not," Con interrupted her. " I came to get the promise of his vote in the election."

" Faith, then, I believe you'll get that cheap enough," she said, " for he took the pledge last Wednesday, the poor man, after the trouble happened him the last fair day."

She laughed as she said this and went to the door to look for her husband. When she saw Peggy and Mary she insisted on them taking a seat at the fire while little Johnny was despatched hot-foot to find his father.

Thus they spent the day, and more days after it, penetrating to places of whose very existence Con had not hitherto been aware, meeting electors surly and conciliatory, indifferent and enthusiastic, in every sort of surroundings. Strong farmers counting their cattle in the fields, small farmers filling turf in the bog ; labourers spreading stones upon the roads or breaking stones by the wayside ; shopkeepers anxious for their custom or hopeless of ever obtaining it even in return for a vote.

Con was amazed at the density of the population in some places, and noticed with surprise the sharp contrast between the many different houses they visited. Some with creepers upon the walls and clean approaches and, inside, kitchens spick and span, parlours furnished with the primness of rarely occupied rooms : in such houses even the stray chicken which found its way through the door seemed spruce and well-mannered. Others, bleak, staring buildings of cold, grey stone, gave promise of a damp and cheerless interior by the straggling dung pits and muddy pools outside. And one dwelling especially Con remembered, a rare relic of the old hard times, whose long-ago whitewashed walls were stained with bilious yellow streaks running down from its rotting thatch, while, within, its aged occupant blinked with red-rimmed eyes through the dark, smoke-laden air of its single room.

They met, as they journeyed, now with unreasonable rebuffs and now with unexpected support, encouraging them to go on. In one place a vote was secured through local jealousy ; in another by the sheer merit of the cause they stood for, and here and there Mary's undoubted popularity won for them promises of adhesion where they had hardly dared to

hope for it. For all that, though they spoke bravely, as workers in a winning cause, to all they met, they were not too well satisfied with the results of their canvass in the parish of Killeely. Even reckoning many doubtful votes as theirs they could not count on more than half the electors in their own immediate neighbourhood. Father Hehir had worked for them independently, but, as a set off to this, Father Mulryan openly favoured the sitting member, and did not hesitate to work as hard for him as his curate did for Con, so that the coolness which had arisen between them on account of the parish priest's attitude towards the Gaelic League now developed into something as near to hostility as the nature of their calling permitted.

"Now we'll try Keownstown," said Con after the fifth day.

"While you're there I will go back over some of the doubtfuls here," said Mary.

"You might tackle Mr. Willoughby, too," said Con.

"I will," said Mary.

CHAPTER XXVI

Though the Folanes' home was only a mile outside Keownstown there had been almost as little intercourse between Rathcarrig and Kilcormac after Peggy's marriage as before it; and, driving with Peggy up the side road which led to the house, Con felt that he was visiting his brother-in-law almost as a stranger. It was not that Con was a snob or that Peggy had assumed grand notions when she made so good a match for herself. This could not be said of either of them. But the brains of the family seemed to have been concentrated in Peggy's pretty head, and her natural gentility of manner was the result of her own disposition rather than of any early training she had received at home. There was nothing in common between the O'Hickies and the Folanes, beyond the mutual interest in cattle and land and crops shared by all dwellers in the country. Con could sit for hours in Jerry-Ned's hospitable kitchen on the mountain side above Rathcarrig and find a hundred subjects unconnected with agriculture to discuss with the wizened and bent old patriot who was his nearest neighbour. But ten minutes sufficed to bring a silence between him and James Folane, and when Peggy was present their talk was of distant relatives of whom he had no knowledge nor anxiety to acquire it.

Jim Folane would have been very little use to them as an electioneering agent, and they would not have

turned to Kilcormac for assistance, had not a lucky chance caused Peggy's other brother, Brian, to be at home on a visit. Brian, who had been in America, and intended to return there, had something of Peggy's fire, and was not unlike her in appearance, though he had little of her charm. But he had plenty of energy, and once he had grasped the issue which Con and his sister intended to put before the electors he threw himself vigorously into the contest, somewhat to the displeasure of his elder brother, who resembled almost all the members of his prosperous class in his dislike of any abrupt disturbance of the *status quo*.

The Folanés were strong farmers, the biggest in fact in the parish of Keownstown, and the room in which they found Brian, surrounded by papers and voters' lists, was large and comfortable. It contained some heavy, old-fashioned furniture, and the table at which Brian was working was of oak, with solid, square legs. The window looked out on a small garden planted with apple trees, and beyond the privet hedge at the bottom a well-filled hay barn shut out the view of the distant mountains.

"'Tis strange," said Brian, after they had exchanged a hasty greeting, "what changes occur in a place in a few years. Not that many farms or houses change hands, but so many old people die: why, a dozen voters on this list alone aren't in it now, Jim tells me. I'm greatly handicapped by being away."

"We'll have to look out for personation on the polling day," said Con, as this new danger struck him.

Brian reported the progress he had made during the week, and they were glad to hear that his story was more hopeful than the one they had to tell of Killeely.

"Peter P. Vahey is down and out in these parts," he said, "I guess he made a miscalculation the day

he went to a races and forgot to ask a question about railroad rates or something that was troubling the people of Keownstown."

"That's news to me," said Con; "so much the best anyway."

Con had to speak at Keownstown after first Mass the next morning, and they had the whole day before them to open their canvassing campaign, for Peggy and he were to stay the night at Kilcormac.

"Shew me your grip," said Brian, "and I'll pack it up to your room. Then we'll get to business." He had been working in his shirt sleeves, despite the time of year, and he put on his wide-shouldered Yankee coat as he spoke.

Canvassing around Keownstown was a repetition of their experiences in their own parish; and the open air meeting at the church gate resembled those at which he had spoken the Sunday before in all but the fact that for the first time he was conscious of a more favourable temper among his hearers. Peggy, who ventured to make a short speech in Irish, received an ovation which put them in great heart as they started off on their whirlwind tour to speak at four other centres before nightfall.

Meanwhile Mary Lalor and Father Hehir were assiduously pestering any who were yet waverers in and around Kilteely. They visited the Hectors together. Though their attempt was doomed to failure, they undertook it rather in order to spy out the enemy's position than in any hope of gaining an unexpected vote. Ambrose, who as an auctioneer had his own axe to grind, was pompously courteous in his manner, while Henry ostentatiously affected surprise that they should call on him, a well-known pillar of the Party (and of the Church, too, he implied, as a rebuke to Father Hehir) on such an errand,

Mary had undertaken to approach Mr. Willoughby and, little as she liked the prospect of the interview with the old Tory landlord, she decided to get it over as soon as possible, and so, after lunching at Gortroe, where Dick Keane's promise to vote right was not difficult to extract, she set off on her bicycle with the intention of reaching Rivervale about tea-time.

She rode down the well-kept avenue wondering what line she would take with Mr. Willoughby. She had been a regular visitor at Rivervale as a young girl, and at one time was almost intimate with its owner; but she and the Willoughbys had gradually drifted apart as she grew older and began to express her views, so horribly unorthodox in their eyes, more openly. It was therefore as a comparative stranger that she now went to see them, and she knew that the object of her visit when she divulged it would not make a resumption of their old relationship any the easier.

The awkwardness, however, which she half expected to feel, and to perceive in them, was obviated by the presence at tea in the drawingroom of Mr. Fitzgerald, of Fitzgeraldstown, a man whose name has been casually mentioned in this book, but who has not hitherto himself appeared in it.

He was a remarkable man, and only his frequent absence from home and the extreme conservatism of his nature can explain the fact that Con had not met him, nor had he been inside Rathcarrig gates for twenty-five years. He regarded Mary as a child, as indeed she was beside him, but she admired him ardently and she felt for him an attachment which, for all the coldness of her nature, was nearer akin to a woman's love than to a child's affection. Mary and he had always been good friends though she saw little

of him, and when she shook hands with him on that Sunday afternoon she had not met him for over a year.

"I have been to Japan and the South Sea Islands and South America since," he explained, when she inquired why she had not seen him for so long.

"Travelling suits you, you're looking younger and stronger than ever," she said.

Indeed, he carried his sixty-five years very bravely. His weather-beaten face was wrinkled, it is true, but there was a clearness in the red tan of his skin and a firmness about his cheeks and neck which made the deep lines in his face and forehead hardly noticeable. His hair was white, but it was still thick, and his moustache, neatly clipped in military fashion, shewed but few grey hairs among the red. There was a young man's twinkle in his eyes, and his smile revealed a perfect set of teeth.

His genuine pleasure at seeing Mary obscured the less cordial welcome of the Willoughbys.

They talked awhile of Mr. Fitzgerald's recent voyages ; but a turn of the conversation to the current events of the locality brought it almost at once to the subject of the impending election.

Mary made no delay in declaring her own deep interest in it. First she attacked the official Nationalist party, sure of her ground, thus far at least, with Mr. Willoughby. The other man was an unknown quantity in politics. Then she went on to expound the ideas advocated by Con, though she did not tell them that she was part author of his election address and responsible for some at least of the ideas it contained. In pleading the cause which was hers as much as his she allowed herself to be carried away by her own keenness rather further than she could have wished. She spoke less of the shortcomings of Peter

Paul Vahey and the party to which he belonged and expatiated more on her own ideals for the future of Ireland than she had intended. Mrs. Willoughby and her daughters, who seemed bored, yawned or sighed in a superior manner. The men listened to her with attention, Mr. Fitzgerald clearly much interested in what she was saying, Mr. Willoughby, equally obviously, shewing disapproval of her sentiments by his attitude, but waiting his time to make answer. It was only when she let slip a version of their summing up of the issue—"Ireland a Nation or West Britain a province"—that he spoke.

"I seldom heard," he said, "so many statements made in a short time with which I disagreed, or so many things taken for granted which I believe to be founded on entirely false assumptions."

Mary was quite ready for battle, and she looked forward to the argument which was coming the more by reason of the presence of an intelligent and apparently unbiassed listener.

"Let's take them one by one," said Mary.

"Very well," Mr. Willoughby replied. "Though I have a good memory I cannot expect to remember everything you have said, but I can recall enough to serve my purpose. In the first place you assume an Irish nation: I deny its existence, and, even if I granted it, I would not admit that there was only one, for there are two perfectly distinct races in the country."

"But . . ." Mary began to expostulate.

"One minute," said Mr. Willoughby, "I let you talk without interruption. The least you can do is to let me enumerate some of what I consider your more glaring errors. Fitzgerald, you must see fair play."

"I'll try," said he, rising to his feet: the ladies of

the house had pleaded domestic occupations and were leaving the room.

"Then you assume," the old gentleman went on as the door closed, "that Ireland could pay her way if she had an existence separate from Great Britain, whereas it is surely as plain as a pikesatff that it is only English generosity that enables Ireland to pull along at all."

Mary made a sound suggestive of dissent.

"You take no account of our class, which is the most important in the country, for it possesses nine-tenths of the landed property, and is responsible for carrying on such industries as the indolent Irish character does not bring to grief. You count by mere heads, like some long-haired greasy socialist mob orator in Hyde Park, instead of giving due weight to a man's stake in the country, his education, and his breeding."

"What else?" inquired Mary.

"Let me see. Yes; you talk of the Irish language, which I have never heard spoken in all the sixty odd years I have lived in Rivervale, as if it was something alive and useful, instead of a *patois*, extinct except in the mouths of a few old barbarous peasants and fishermen living in hovels on the western coast."

Mary so far departed from her obligation to keep silence as to interject: "I'm afraid the only Irish paper you read is the *Irish Times*," but he did not notice the interruption.

"Twenty other things equally absurd," he continued. "I can hardly recollect them. For example, you do not seem to realize that Irish people—that is, the Irish people you consider worth counting—have no capacity for government. They are like the Indians: often good workers under efficient control,

but requiring the beneficent direction of the Empire to show them what is really for their benefit."

"Oh, really, Mr. Willoughby, I can't sit still listening to you without saying a word any longer. Is it not my turn now, Mr. Fitzgerald?"

Fitzgerald suggested to his friend that it might be interesting to see how she would deal with his exposure of her case.

"Do you not realize," Mary exclaimed, "can you not see, Mr. Willoughby, that this beneficent administration of the British Empire means in reality the ousting of an ancient civilization by another, totally opposed to it in every way?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Mr. Willoughby.

"Our class never reads history and so knows nothing of the truth," Mary began.

"Oh, it's always the same," Mr. Willoughby objected, "this perpetual harping on old wrongs wearies me. Everyone admits that England treated Ireland badly in regard to religious laws and commercial restrictions in the early eighteenth century. But that is ancient history, It has all been more than repaired even in my time. Look at the Disestablishment of the Church and the endowment of Maynooth. What more can you want. As to industry, Irish backwardness is due to Irish character. Under the Union, conditions are exactly equal in Ireland and Great Britain. The success of Belfast is proof enough of that."

"Before I forget what I was going to say," said Mary, "let me say it; then I can take you up about the Irish character, religious equality, and the innumerable things your last remark raises. I said people of our class, reading no history, know no truth.

I do not mean recent history, though that is badly neglected in all schools."

"History in the National Schools is disgraceful political propagandism," put in Mr. Willoughby. "Facts are distorted, or even made up where they don't suit the writer."

"I would say that school histories are the most colourless and tasteless wash ever served out to the children of any country," said Mary. "But no matter, you can't deny that Ireland had a civilization, an attitude towards life if you like, peculiarly its own before the English invasion came into it and disturbed its natural development as violently as the Gothic incursions into Roman civilization."

Mr. Fitzgerald spoke for the first time: "That is going a little too far," he said.

"A little!" exclaimed their host, "why, everyone knows that the Irish were no more than a pack of petty tribes, for ever squabbling with one another and ignorant of the first elements of civilization when Strongbow landed in the country."

"There I contradict you," said Mary. "It is true that they had not yet reached anything like political unity, but even that existed for a short time under Brian Boru, and, if he had not been killed, he might have put it on a firm footing. Remember we are talking of quite early times when the English themselves were not very far advanced. They had ceased to stain themselves with woad, but that is about all. They had absolutely no tradition as a nation, whereas Ireland had."

"Since when England has been accumulating tradition and Ireland losing it," Mr. Fitzgerald remarked.

"That's not Ireland's fault," Mary retorted;

"Ireland had converted half Europe to Christianity for one thing; Ireland had, though I suppose you will both deny it, a civilization which must have been remarkably high in the sixth to tenth centuries. When one considers the position, for example, of women and poets in it (Mr. O'Hickie—whom you don't think much of—lent me a book on the Brehon laws), they were a wonderfully complete code. This is what English invasions and interference knocked on the head."

"For my part," said Mr. Fitzgerald judicially, "I don't deny the truth of what you say, but I think the mistake you make is that you over-emphasize its importance at the present day."

"Oh, no," Mary replied: "it's direct cause and effect. Englishmen planted feudalism on the top of the Brehon system, with the result that we have now an Irish Question, an impoverished country, and the peculiar Irish character Mr. Willoughby despises so much." She left her chair and stood at the fire with her back to the flames, a characteristically ungirlish attitude of hers. Mr. Fitzgerald regarded her critically, but it was rather her essentially feminine features, and especially her eyes all alight with argument and enthusiasm that he looked at; the masculine lines of her mouth and the way she stood, like a man laying down the law in a club smoke-room, somehow did not strike him as incongruous. "That reminds me of what you said just now, Mr. Willoughby," she was saying. "The faults of Irish character (of course they exist) are largely of English making. Can you expect people, who have been ground down under those harsh penal laws which you regard as ancient history, to forget at once the habits of slavery they have been forced by circumstances to adopt? Can

you expect the descendants of mere hewers of wood and carriers of water to resume the independence of their earlier ancestors when it took generations to reduce the people to a state of servility. They are only beginning now to recover themselves, and as long as there is an ascendancy class in power over them, as they still have in actual fact, they will be bound to waste their energies in trying to get rid of it instead of turning them to constructive work."

"It seems to me," put in Mr. Fitzgerald, "that if they go on wasting their energies in this direction much longer any capacity they may possess for recovery will have atrophied."

"I agree," said Mary. "That is one of our election points." She turned to Mr. Willoughby again: "As to your Belfast, you forget that England fostered the industries of northern Orangemen as a sort of pretence that compensation was being made for destroying those of southern Catholics. You can blow up a house in a moment, but it takes years to build it again. How can you say the injuries of the past have been repaired, when you sit here in Rivervale with good land all round you and the wretched little farmers, around Barnagweeha Chapel above, struggle to live on their patches of bog and mountain? Your ancestor drove them out of their homes."

"Exactly," said Mr. Willoughby. "They were not virile enough to retain what they had, and so had to give place to stronger men. A mere instance of the natural law, the survival of the fittest."

"Ah! I fancy you have just expressed the real difference between the essence of British civilization and Gaelic," said Mary.

"Nonsense, Mary, the British Empire is founded on justice and the rights of conquered peoples. Look

at the map and tell me a spot marked red on it where this does not hold good."

"Ireland," replied Mary.

"I give you up as hopeless," said Mr. Willoughby. "Don't expect me to vote at all in this nationalist squabble of yours. You are the same in the twentieth century as you were in the tenth—always faction fighting amongst yourselves."

Mary got up to go, feeling hot and half angry with herself for beating her head against the stone wall of Mr. Willoughby's prejudice. She was delighted when Mr. Fitzgerald suggested that he should walk as far as the lodge with her. He was to stay the night at Rivervale: he wanted some fresh air before dinner, he said.

"Mary," said he, when they were outside, "you've developed since I knew you."

Mary laughed. "You have a vote, I suppose," she said.

"I'm too old to accept all your ideas," said Mr. Fitzgerald, "but I shall give it for your friend. And I must make his acquaintance when this election is over. I will ask you and him to spend a week-end at Fitzgeraldstown."

"He's married, you know," said Mary.

"Well, let him bring his wife with him," was the reply.

"That will be delightful, whether we win or lose," said Mary, as she lighted her lamp at the lodge gate.

"Good-bye," she said, mounting.

"Good-bye and good luck," he called after her.

CHAPTER XXVII

Con was lucky in his small band of helpers, for they made his cause their own and worked almost more strenuously than he in the struggle to overthrow the bossism of Irish politics and to infuse into them a new and more truly Irish spirit. The polling day was fixed for Thursday, and from the previous Sunday till the Wednesday night they all laboured frantically in a last desperate endeavour to overcome the handicap of their lack of established organization. They had to face, with but the scantiest of equipment, a well armed enemy strongly entrenched in a position which he had long held unchallenged ; and the shortness of the time allowed them to explain to the electors the motive of their attack and the nature of their opinions could only have been effectively countered by unlimited money and a multitude of speakers. Neither of these they possessed. Their venture was therefore in the nature of a forlorn hope : yet, with the optimism of people who put their whole heart all together into a common purpose, they still hoped in spite of many adverse signs that they would win, if only by the barest margin.

The men of Rathcarrig, though they had taken no active part in the campaign beyond publicly expressing their adhesion to the " factionist " camp and ostentatiously wearing its favours, marched in a body to the schoolhouse which was the polling booth for Killeely. There such of them as an incomplete register allowed to vote made vigorous crosses against

O'Hickie's name. Of the others, some vainly tried to claim a similar right, and all did their utmost to damp the cocksure attitude of the Vaheyites and to coerce the few electors who still kept their own counsel. They knew well, as they surveyed the queue at the schoolhouse or mixed with the crowds of idlers who talked in holiday groups on the fair green, that whatever chance he might have in the distant parts of the constituency their man could hope for no majority in that centre. The struggling cheers which were raised for any well-known Vaheyite, as he arrived to give his vote, shewed which way the popular feeling ran, though Mary Lalor's personal influence, coupled with Father Hehir's popularity, had won for Con several supporters who would not otherwise have thought of voting for him. He was well liked personally, except by the set he had so mortally offended by his action about the secretaryship of the co-operative society ; but the general opinion was that his candidature was a regrettable mistake. Many, who made no effort to hide their preference for him as a man, wore Peter Paul's green favour because they were ultra conservative by nature : they disliked any disturbance of the conditions they were accustomed to, and regarded Con as a dangerous element, not to be tolerated in the quiet and muddy waters of latter-day Irish politics. The insidious influence of the Hectors, too, and the lying stories so cleverly put in circulation by Hanvy, hugging his revenge, did him much harm, for even though the discreditable things with which Con was charged were not generally believed they were sufficient to create an atmosphere of distrust and to deprive him of a substantial number of possible votes.

It was expected that the declaration of the poll would be made from Keownstown courthouse about four o'clock on the Friday evening. No work had

been done in Rathcarrig on those two days, beyond the minimum which feeding of stock and milking of cows demanded on working days and holidays alike. Paddy Stack and Tim MacDwyer and one or two of the newer men in Rathcarrig had bicycles. All who had them went early to Keownstown, anxious to be in at the finish. As the afternoon wore on, the others made their way to Spellissey's house, gathering there to await the return of the cyclists, who were expected to come first to the old man's cottage with news of the result.

It was quite dark when Thady Comyn, after a last look at the housed cattle, groped his way around to the cottage, where he found four or five others already waiting. Spellissey was phlegmatically sucking an old clay pipe, his feet stretched almost into the sods of turf which glowed on the open hearth. Pat O'Brien, in a chair on the other side of the fire, was tugging uneasily at his beard. Tommy MacMahon, who alone of the party appeared to be in good spirits, was whispering to Delia Spellissey, as she busied herself with some household duty in the background. His brother stood between Pat O'Brien and the other old man, moodily cutting up his plug of tobacco with a pocket knife.

"God bless all here," said Thady, as he entered.

The sudden look of expectancy which had crossed the faces of the occupants of the room gave place to the prevailing pessimism, which had marked them before, as soon as they perceived the identity of the newcomer.

"You're welcome, Thady," said Spellissey, "but indeed we thought 'twas Tim and Paddy was in it, when we heard the latch of the door."

"'Tis them's the slow travellers for all their grand bicycles," said Tommy MacMahon from his corner.

"Maybe they met with an accident on the road," said O'Brien. "The night is dark already."

"Or maybe the voting was so close they had to count the papers secondly," said Thady Comyn hopefully. He looked out of the door as he spoke.

"Well, whatever it was, we'll soon know," he said over his shoulder, "for there is a light coming down the avenue this minute: 'tis surely Paddy's new lamp, I'd know it in a thousand."

He was right, for in a few moments a voice came through the darkness: "We're beat and badly."

Thady transmitted the news.

"How much?" they asked of the new arrivals.

"Four thousand against one," announced Stack.

"Cripes, but we're disgraced entirely," said the elder MacMahon.

"You're coddling us," said Delia, but without hope in her tone.

"I am not," returned Paddy Stack, "I wrote down the figures in a piece of paper for fear I'd forget them. Wait now," he added, fumbling in his waistcoat pocket, "here they are: Vahey, 4085; O'Hickie 1727."

"That's not as bad as you said," was MacMahon's comment.

"'Tis bad enough, anyhow," remarked Tim MacDwyer.

"'Tis indeed," said Spellissey.

"'Tis my opinion," Tim went on, "that there was bad work in this election."

"Don't you know there was," said Paddy Stack. "Was there ever an election without bad work?"

"There was not," Tim agreed, "but all the same for that, this was the worst I ever saw."

"Sure, you never saw an election before, since you was a gorsoon," said Pat O'Brien.

"Faith, then, I did, see an election, and a hot one, too."

"Yerra, whisht," cried Spellissey, "who wants your old talk, the two o' ye."

"There was bad work, and damn bad work too in it," Tim grumbled.

"'Tis true for him, what he's saying," said 'Thady, "such an amount of porter as was given out at Henry Hoctor's was never heard tell of. That's nothing. But the stories Jack Hanvy's been putting about are bad work, if you like."

"I wouldn't say," Tim MacDwyer remarked in a calm voice, "but the day will come when that bloody fellow will get a beating."

"'Twould be the price of him, whatever," said one or two.

"Yerra, nobody minds his stories," Spellissey said.

"Well, there was worse than that in it. You men living in here don't know what does be going on outside," said Tim. "You'd want to be living a bit away like me. The way that dirty crowd worked would shame the divil himself. 'Tis to send letters around they did, threatening to burn the hay on people and maybe stake their meadows next summer if they voted for the boss."

"That's actionable," Spellissey stated.

"Maybe it is," said Tim, "but what about it. Sure 'tis easy for them say 'twas a put up thing on our side to upset the election."

"You couldn't be up to them at all," said Pat O'Brien, almost admiringly, the inevitable hand at his beard.

Spellissey put an end to the discussion. "Anyway," he said, "no one's saying they're not blackguards, for all the world knows it. Tell us what happened in Keownstown. Did Mr. O'Hickie make a speech after the poll was declared?"

"He did," said Tim, "he didn't say much, but what he said was true enough."

"What did he say, Paddy?"

"He said that he'd done his best, again' big odds, to fight for truth and honesty; that Peter Paul had too much pull this time, but he hoped he'd be put out the next time. He told the people that the day would come when they'd see things the same way as he did. Wasn't that it, Tim?"

"It was, and he said more than that too. He thanked what people had voted for him, and thanked God that there was even that much men in it that cared for Irish Nationality: something like that. He said a lot more but I disremember it. Besides, there was a lot of young fellows bawling at the back of the crowd and 'twasn't easy hear."

"I didn't like what Peter Paul said about the boss," said Paddy. "He had drink taken, by the look of him. The mistress was there and Miss Mary. Some ignorant cornerboy threw a stone, and 'twas a near thing but it hit them. I thought they looked a kind of proud, and they going away."

"Well, glory be to God, 'tis over now, at all events," said Pat O'Brien, getting up to go home.

"Maybe 'tis as well the boss didn't get in," said Thady, going out after him, "he'd be poisoned with all the slingers looking to him to get soft jobs for them if he did."

"I tell you what it is," said old Spellissey to his daughter, when they found themselves alone. "'Tis true for Thady what he said. I'm half glad the master was beaten, though I'd be better pleased than a hundred pounds if that Peter Paul got put in his right place. You couldn't depend the black o' your nail on that fellow," he added savagely.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Con had done his very utmost to win the election, but when it was over, and he beaten, he dismissed it from his mind, half glad to be spared the anxieties and responsibilities of public life. His position would have been particularly difficult, ploughing his lonely political furrow ; and not only would he have started on a difficult path, a thing in itself not altogether objectionable to him, but, far more serious prospect, it would have been one utterly uncongenial to his nature. Con could enter with relish upon an undertaking requiring strenuous activity provided it was a mere passing episode, but his real tastes lay in the quiet work of the countryside, on his farm, in his small industrial efforts, and in the problem of rural society.

Peggy, on the other hand, though she had no wish to drive Con into a career for which he had little inclination, was disgusted at the result of the election, and longed for an opportunity of renewing the fight. Living with Con had taught her to understand his outlook on the fundamentals of Irish life, as he had now grasped hers. But while they each understood and respected the point of view the other held, the essential difference remained. Both hoped ardently for the ultimate independence of their country, but Con believed that it could best be achieved by a gradual and peaceful revolution, cultural and economic, springing spontaneously from within the every-

day life of the country, and culminating in its final regeneration and the inevitable political freedom which would follow ; while Peggy, more passionate and less philosophical than he in her love for Ireland, was becoming ever more appalled by the drift and lethargy which had fallen upon the country, and obsessed by the conviction that nothing could dispel it, short of extreme measures, involving perhaps the loss of lives invaluable in that work of internal regeneration, the necessity of which she did not deny.

Shortly after Christmas they were asked by Mr. Fitzgerald to spend a week-end at Fitzgeraldstown, and they learned from Mary Lalor that not only she but also Mr. Willoughby had been invited too. Mr. Fitzgerald had made no idle remark when he told Mary at Rivervale that he was anxious to make Con's acquaintance, and she looked forward with pleasant anticipation to this opportunity of promoting a friendship between the three people who were her most intimate associates. Her only regret was that Mr. Willoughby was to be one of the party, for she feared that his dogmatic manner would subdue Peggy and make her silent, if it did not provoke her to an outburst which would be equally harmful to Mary's project of converting Mr. Fitzgerald to her way of thinking. The real Peggy would be a most potent ally. The Peggy whom Mr. Willoughby's attitude might evoke would afford damning evidence of the extremism which she wished to show Mr. Fitzgerald was not a necessary part of advanced nationalism.

The situation Mary had feared, however, was not to arise, for it appeared that Mr. Willoughby would only stay over Saturday night. There was to be a shoot on that day, in which Con and Mary would be two of the guns and Peggy a spectator. She would

have all Sunday to turn their conversation on to the topic she wished to discuss.

A somewhat uncomfortable situation did in fact arise, not as the result of the circumstances Mary feared, but by reason of Mr. Fitzgerald's ignorance of the social relationship of his guests. He had been so much away from home since Con's marriage that he did not know that Con was now not even on calling terms with the county families. He was therefore taken aback when he perceived the embarrassment with which Mr. Willoughby and the other county magnates he had invited to shoot his coverts greeted Con, and the distant condescension with which they acknowledged the existence of Peggy when they were introduced to her. The business of shooting, however, obviated any serious unpleasantness, and Mr. Willoughby discovered an unexpected obligation to return to Rivervale that night, so that Mary and Peggy and Con were after all the only guests at Fitzgeraldstown for the week-end.

Mr. Fitzgerald was a perfect host. His house was well-ordered, with the comforts which only an elderly bachelor of cultured tastes and plenty of money collects around him. His manner to Peggy was charming in its old-world courtesy, and to Con he spoke as to an equal in years, putting him instantly at his ease, and making him almost regret his inability to appreciate properly the 1870 port in which Mr. Fitzgerald seemed to take an almost affectionate pride.

There was nothing in him of the self-important superiority of those other members of the landlord class, for he had long ago shaken himself free of the rut in which they lived, and he liked their self-satisfied complacency as little as he imitated it.

Con had shot well and dined well, and he felt a

great sense of personal well-being as he smoked a cigar in the diningroom after Peggy and Mary left them, while his host sipped his port and told him stories of his adventures in the four corners of the globe. He was in no hurry to exchange Mr. Fitzgerald's anecdotes for conversation in the study, but his host was not the man to forget his other guests, and all too soon, Con thought, he found himself in an armchair in the library, but still smoking the cigar of his life.

Mr. Fitzgerald for the first time indirectly alluded to the election.

"I see our member has been making his maiden speech in the House," he said.

"Oh," said Con, "what was he talking about? I did not see a paper to-day."

"Nothing, really," Mr. Fitzgerald replied, "it is hard to see the point of his speech."

"That was our trouble in the election," said Con, "we tried to make them see the issue plainly, but they persisted in confusing it."

"To tell you the truth," said Mr. Fitzgerald, "not knowing you at the time, I was not very much interested in the election, beyond the efforts of my friend Mary to secure Mr. Willoughby's vote—in which she was not successful, in spite of her eloquent pleading. I am really much more interested after the event; sufficiently so, indeed, to be anxious to hear you explain yourself the *raison d'être* for a schism in the Nationalist ranks. I daresay you can, as you say, make the issue clear in a few words."

"In my election address, as at every meeting I spoke at," said Con, "I repeated these half-dozen words: 'Ireland a Nation or West Britain a province. If you have heard Mary enlarging on this to Mr. Willoughby, no doubt you understand that we put

nationality before prosperity, or at least as an antecedent to it. Mary is much better than I am at expressing a point of view. You should get her to explain the outlook of Irish-Ireland, as we call it."

"I think our formula which Con is after using," said Mary, "puts our election case in a nutshell. But tell me why did you vote for Mr. O'Hickie?"

"The way you tackled Mr. Willoughby probably caused me to use my vote for the first time in my life. As a result of that I, too, saw the election issue quite clearly, though it did not present itself to me in the same way as it does to you."

"What would your formula be, then?" asked Mary.

"Ideas or platitudes: something like that would express the difference between the two sides, as I saw it," replied Mr. Fitzgerald. "Still," he added, "though I recognize that you had ideas on your side and that the others hadn't, I am not yet quite certain what you are driving at."

It was Mary who replied to him: "We are offered citizenship of the British Empire, as if that was the the highest thing the world had to offer. It doesn't appeal to us. Perhaps we have perverted minds, or perhaps it is only another proof of the great gulf which is fixed between British civilization or culture and Irish—what is left of it. We might have no objection (Mrs. O'Hickie and I, for instance, differ on this point) to citizenship in the British Empire if it did not mean the inevitable decay of our Irish nationality and our eventual incorporation in a sort of composite British nation. Rightly or wrongly, we are inordinately proud of being a distinct nation. This is a much more important matter than people like you realize, Mr. Fitzgerald: for I don't believe it ever occurs to you to think of it."

"I'm sure I'm as proud as anyone of being Irish," said he.

"You are, I know," replied Mary, "in a way, in some ways, you are more Irish than any of us, with your love of Irish music and poetry, and all that. But at the same time I venture to guess that you have not thought out the thing to its logical conclusion. You are proud of being Irish, but there is something in that pride like the pride of an English public school boy in his school. It would never occur to you, for instance, in Japan let us say, to insist that you were Irish, not British, would it?"

"I really don't know, perhaps not; what good would it be in any case?" asked Mr. Fitzgerald.

"I think, as a matter of fact, that it would be some actual good, for you would have done your share in combating the idea which English people so calmly put about the world, namely, that the British Isles are both of them British and are willing partners in the joint Kingdom. It is most irritating the way people assume that Ireland is not a nation: that is our real reason for insisting so much on our nationality. If we don't the day may come when we will take ourselves at other people's valuation."

"Never," exclaimed Peggy, "there will always be a gallant band in Ireland to keep the light burning, however low the nation may fall as a whole. But, all the same, you are right: we must insist on our nationality. Only so can we put the people at home in a fighting spirit. We can insist on our rights if we are keen enough about them. A really determined nation would be irresistible against any odds. It's just because we are weak and half-hearted that it matters what other people think. No one questions the nationality of Spain, for instance, or even of the

Poles. But they have their language, our only chance lies in ours, I believe."

"Of course," Con remarked, "I agree with what Peggy has just said. But let Mary go on putting her case."

"I'm sorry," said Peggy, subsiding with a grimace.

Mary picked up her thread again: "Irish nationality exists and is real because we in Ireland believe in it. If the bulk of a people living within clearly defined geographical boundaries passionately believe that they are a separate and distinct nation surely they are one; more especially if they have behind them both tradition and history which can shew that they have not been part of any other nation, and if they possess certain recognized characteristics of a nation, such as a language."

"Does a dead language mean a dead nation in your view?" Mr. Fitzgerald inquired.

"A sick and weakly one, certainly; but not necessarily dead, if there are other marks to distinguish it from the particular nation by which it is supposed to have been absorbed. Ireland, for instance, differs from England in religion; the way of life of our people is absolutely different, even from that of agricultural England, to say nothing of industrial and commercial England; and even the laws we live under—half of them made by the Union Parliament—are quite different from English laws: a clear proof of the difference of the conditions of the two countries."

"You make out a good case," said Mr. Fitzgerald. "I don't deny that Ireland is a nation; and I never did, I think, though you may say that I have often done so in a negative way."

"You don't, perhaps; but many so-called Irishmen do. You heard Mr. Willoughby at Rivervale that day. All the planter class, at least the upper class settlers,

are the same. The *Irish Times* in its leading articles speaks their minds perfectly."

"Their opinions are made by the *Irish Times*," said Con, "and by the natural fear the upper dog feels of any change in the *status quo*."

"The *Irish Times* is a grand example of British hypocrisy," said Peggy. "I've been reading it since I got married and it almost fascinates me, the way it boycotts Irish things, our national games, for instance; giving them any out-of-the-way corner if it mentions them at all—unless there is a row at a hurling final or something like that: then we have a big headline and a leading article on the badness of the people."

"A homily on the inferiority of the Celt, with a thanksgiving that the ascendancy are not as other men," Con remarked.

"Those leading articles compel me to read them," Peggy went on. "I want to see how often the words 'every decent Irishman' will appear, or what will be the 'but' in the last sentence which will spoil all the almost nice things about Mr. Redmond or the Gaelic League, or whatever it is, in the first half of the article."

"There is always a damning 'but' lurking behind its honeyed words," said Con. "But, Peggy, I have a damning 'but' like the *Irish Times*: you will not let Mary get on."

"I'm not giving a lecture," she put in. "Why shouldn't Peggy have her say as well as me?"

"I'm sorry again," said Peggy, "go on, Mary. You were just getting Mr. Fitzgerald to the point of becoming an Irish-Irelander."

Mr. Fitzgerald laughed, and Mary continued with, despite her protest to Con, something of the lecturer's manner: "The English all deny our nationhood, Liberals who call themselves Home Rulers (barring

a few exceptions whom I have a respect for) just as much as Unionists. The great trouble in Ireland seems to me to be the fact that our class in the main regards itself as England's faithful garrison, and is hopelessly out of touch with the Irish people. We go to school in England, and spend our holidays there, and consider it 'good form' to be English. You Protestants even go to England for your wives, so as to water down what Irish blood you have."

"My mother wasn't English," Mr. Fitzgerald protested.

"Oh, you're an exception in some ways already, and we mean to make you one entirely," Mary said, laughing.

"Well," said he, "I can see that there is a lot in your Irish-Ireland ideas as you call them. I gather from what you have said now, and in our other talks, that what you aim at is to substitute an Irish culture for the present imported article, and at the same time to build up the economic life of the country by what I may call a system of voluntary protection."

"Exactly," said Mary, "we want to become self-reliant: more self-supporting industrially and more self-centred mentally and spiritually."

"Too great detachment is apt to degenerate into selfishness," Mr. Fitzgerald remarked.

"We must pass through a stage of something like that," said Con, "before we can safely take much from any other nation. We have been absorbing foreign influences for so long now that we cannot afford to be other than self-centred for a while. We have a knack of absorbing the worst, not the best, from outside."

"I could become an Irish-Irelander to-morrow," said Mr. Fitzgerald, "if I could be satisfied that what you have been saying is the generally accepted inter-

pretation of the expression. But I belong to an older generation than you three. I have inherited, and perhaps acquired in my youth, a horror of anything like Fenianism ; and your doctrines, in an explosive country like Ireland engaged in a struggle with a stolid and phlegmatic people like the English, are not unlikely to lead much further than perhaps you intend. Now I hate jingoism as much as any of you. I was often called a pro-Boer during the war, and I was one to some extent, though I felt then, as I always do, that I must support my country whether right or wrong."

"There you are, Mr. Fitzgerald," interrupted Peggy : "'my country.' It was not your country, but another big bullying, tyrannical country embarked on that war. No Irishman was under any obligation to be pro-English in it."

"Forgive me," said Mr. Fitzgerald. "I am only feeling my way as an old man to an entirely new mental position. I was about to say that, while I hold no brief for the British Empire in all its actions, I do feel somehow that it has rather a splendid record, and that, as Irishmen have played so big a part in building it up, there should be room in it for an Ireland which can still give its allegiance to the Empire. Ireland could retain her own identity unimpaired just as the Boers will do under the new South African Constitution."

"Let them give us self-government first," said Mary. "I would be quite loyal to the British crown then. But we must have a public recognition of our nationality by the grant of a good Home Rule Act first."

"For my part," said Peggy, "I hate the British Empire and don't want to belong to it one moment longer than I can help. I object to having to go hat

in hand to our conquerors to crave a grant of what is ours by right. Not that I wouldn't take Home Rule if it ever comes, provided it is an Act worth having. But don't talk to me of a generous measure. The most it can be is an instalment of a very much overdue debt."

"I wonder do you really hate the British Empire," said Mr. Fitzgerald. "Why should you, Mrs. O'Hickie?"

"Because it is the only enemy of Irish freedom in the world, in the first place," she answered, "and because it is so inhuman. It is too immense to be human. No one feels patriotism for the British Empire: the British people are indifferent about it in peace time. School children are taught to gloat over a map covered with red splashes—as if one people had any right whatever to possess another. And in war you have jingoes, I suppose, judging from the papers I read a few years ago."

"I was at school in England," said Con, "and I saw the hysterical orgies of Mafeking night. I think that sowed the seeds of my present political faith in me; though I took part in the proceedings myself, in a kind of way," he added reminiscently.

"You are only describing the elements in the British character which I dislike myself," said Mr. Fitzgerald. "There is no doubt that England itself is mildewed and fast degenerating into an almost shameless worship of the almighty dollar. But there are fine achievements to its credit. A carrying of even-handed justice into the far places of the earth, accomplished by no other nation. Look at India, for instance."

"Oh!" exclaimed Peggy.

"What I do not see," Mr. Fitzgerald continued, "is why Ireland should not be able to take her place

in the commonwealth of nations which make up the British Empire, given a decent measure of self-government, of course, for I have been convinced of the necessity of that. Even in the Union she could preserve her nationality. Look at Scotland with all her national characteristics. They are recognized in places like Japan, do you know, where Ireland has never been heard of."

"Only by sophisticated Japs who have come across the inevitable Scottish engineers on board ship," Con said.

"Possibly," he assented. "Well, take Wales, then. Wales has been able to preserve its language in spite of much closer association with England than Ireland's."

"Wales was not a danger to England once it was conquered," said Con, "and so no set policy was adopted which aimed at stamping out the language. We hear a lot about Prussian tyranny in crushing the language and nationality of their Poles and Schleswigers, but I see no difference between that and our Irish case."

"And Germany at least made its conquered territories prosperous. The Union has made Ireland what we know it," said Mary.

"Humph," said Mr. Fitzgerald, "you are three against one and I am myself half with you from the start. I must sleep on it. Rapid conversions do not occur in men of my age."

"I believe we'll have you coming to the Irish class in Kiltelly or starting one here!" Mary declared.

"Stranger things have happened," said he with a laugh, "but you ought to be satisfied with my blessing. It is for the young to labour at such things."

"Then you are with us?" said Mary, triumphantly.

"I said I would sleep on it," was the answer. "Don't torment me."

CHAPTER XXIX

Con and Peggy left Fitzgeraldstown delighted with their host. It was the first visit they had paid together at any big house in the county, and it left an impression on their minds which was altogether pleasant. They were well aware that there were few men among the Irish gentry like Mr. Fitzgerald, but this knowledge only made the finding of a new friend, among the members of a class they disliked, the more welcome, for they already counted Mr. Fitzgerald as a friend, and they felt that he, too, regarded them in the same light.

After the election they began to know real happiness. Con especially felt the joy of living in a way he had never experienced before. He had always, as a healthy man, enjoyed life. He knew what it was to be hungry for his meals, to be pleasantly tired at the end of the day, and to fall asleep without effort ; he had tasted the delights of the farmer's battle with the weather : the sight of his barn fresh-filled with well-saved hay and the faint smell of fermentation blown across the haggard by the breeze ; the sound of contented cattle munching in the warm sheds after dark on a winter's night ; the heat of the turf fire, recalling the summer days when they were working in the bog, surrounded by the fresh green of the young birch trees ; the taste of wheaten cakes made from the corn they had grown on land once barren. Such things make life seem good to those who know them. They

were not new to Con. But as time passed there was added to them a deeper sense of happiness, for he now felt he had in life a purpose greater than the immemorial struggle with and against nature, man's work though that is. He saw before him a lifetime to be devoted to the problems of the modern world as they affect Ireland : the betterment of the hard lot of the workers, of their inadequate pay and their lack of recreation ; the deliverance of the mind and soul of the nation from the yoke of a civilization foreign to it and imposed upon it from without ; the breaking down of prejudice alike in the economic and the cultural life of the country and the substitution of living and practical ideas for the worn-out and incongruous legacy of past centuries of subservience.

He and his intimate friends had a purpose which was ever shaping itself more clearly in their minds. They did not see eye to eye in matters of detail, but they were at one on main principles. Revolutionaries they were, no doubt, for they aimed at subverting the established order of life as they knew it. But the revolution they contemplated was not armed insurrection, but rather the acceleration of a peaceful and gradual evolution towards a less imperfect state of society.

Con, even more than the others, in the years which followed his abortive incursion into politics, came to feel less and less interest in political events. He and Peggy had always differed somewhat as to the importance of politics, which he counted as a mere trapping of the national life, while she regarded them as an essential, inasmuch as only through their instrumentality could essential ends be attained. This question of the importance or unimportance of politics, which was in future years to become so vital that no one could avoid it, receded into the background during

the three or four years after the 1910 general election. These were years, of course, of high political excitement. But Rathcarrig was almost untouched by the passions which were everywhere aroused at the time. The happenings at Westminster, the progress of the Home Rule Bill, and the preparations for resistance which were organized in North East Ulster, could not but possess a considerable interest for Con and Peggy, but they were little more than a casual topic of conversation, in no way interfering with their daily occupations. The public events of those years made the newspapers more interesting than before, but they did not touch Killeely or its people intimately.

Killeely was more concerned with its own affairs than with what Father Hehir, writing from the distant parish to which, to Con's infinite regret, he had been transferred after the election, described as "the unrealities of Westminster and the theatricals of Belfast." Father Hehir had been removed by his bishop, and Father Mulryan had been removed by death, the latter at least a timely intervention of Providence, for he was succeeded by a parish priest of Irish-Ireland sympathies, if uncongenial manners. Father Hehir's transfer, though it carried with it no actual stigma, was a bitter disappointment to him, for he had entered into the life of Killeely more spontaneously and more wholeheartedly than he had found possible in the parishes to which he had previously been sent. Not only did he love its people, but it was also the place above all others where he could find work outside his calling capable of commanding his devoted and untiring effort. The steady success of their battle against anglicization had been largely due to his own energy. He found Killeely a country town spiritless and apathetic and dominated by its shoneen element ;

he left it the centre of an active Gaelic League branch and the home of a score or more of children able to chatter amongst themselves in Irish and to hold delighted secret conversations at the fireside, incomprehensible to their mystified parents. The strength of habit in the public mind had enabled the Vaheys and the Hectors to win the election without difficulty, but it had not prevented the decline of their influence among the people of Killeely. The day had not yet come when the spirit which Father Hehir had laboured so lovingly to inculcate would be born in almost every dweller in the countryside, but it had arisen in the chosen few who would in turn instil it into the hearts of the many.

Much as he regretted leaving Killeely on this account, he had therein no real cause for despondency. The work was well launched and he could feel confident that it would live after him, with a new parish priest at the presbytery pledged to carry it on, and with the O'Hickies and Mary Lalor at hand to help him. It was not this that saddened him, but the personal loss he had sustained in being cut off from his friends and from the work they were quietly setting themselves to do in Rathcarrig.

The vague ideas which Con had struggled to put into words the first Christmas night after his marriage, then impossible of expression because they had not yet formed themselves in his brain, gradually took definite shape. His Gaelic-speaking co-operative commonwealth became a reality in his mind; it was, in fact, to be the re-establishment of the ancient Irish system, adapted to the conditions of the twentieth century.

Their practical schemes had begun humbly with the lime kiln. They admitted that it was a poor start

with its essentially capitalistic basis and the sceptical materialism of its Orange overseer. Nevertheless, the actual accomplishment of this first departure from the beaten track of mere farming, and its real success as a commercial undertaking encouraged them to take thought as to what they should do next still further to develop the rural industrialism of Kiltelly.

The overgrown and crowded woods of Rathcarrig suggested a sawmill, and before long they had installed one with a steam engine to work it. Con's ideas were as yet only tentative theories groping for light at the back of his mind. His main desire was still little more than to alleviate the poverty of Kiltelly by giving as much employment as he could; and, in doing this, he was determined to avoid anything in the nature of philanthropy, as much for the sake of the people concerned as because of the meagre resources he possessed with which to promote new work. They departed, indeed, still further from their co-operative ideals in their new undertaking, which was, like the lime kiln, a purely proprietary concern, and financed by money Con had borrowed from the bank on the security of his stock and land. They did not, however, in this case import an Orangeman to work it, as they happened upon an unemployed sawyer, Denis Conroy by name, whom they discovered with delight to be a fluent Irish speaker: too much of a politician, Con thought, but Peggy found that he called himself a *Sinn Féiner* and held under that name views not unlike her own.

As much perhaps to their own surprise as to those many spectators of their activities who discouragingly prophesied failure, these new undertakings flourished. The quiet avenue became almost a busy thoroughfare; carts bringing in coal for the engine and culm

for the kiln, or going out laden with timber or freshly burned lime for building and for fields. The new works in turn created subsidiary employment: the much frequented avenue required a stone breaker and a road mender to keep it in repair; cottages were built by the district council to meet the increased demand for housing; and Dan Murphy, the carpenter, revealing not only an unexpected reserve of capital, but also an equally unsuspected spirit of enterprise, finding the timber ready to his hand, set up a little woodworking establishment at his house on the Keownstown road. Thus the prospects of Killeteely brightened and its prosperity advanced, to the envy of sleepy Keownstown and the other little towns of the neighbourhood. Even Henry Hocter forbore to do anything to thwart the plans of the O'Hickies, though he regarded them as his enemies; for he too, with his licence and his shop, shared in the common advantages.

After three years working of the sawmill and a longer trial of the lime kiln their financial success seemed to be assured. Con realized that he was actually making money out of them. This, rather than any abstract theory of his, brought him face to face with the ideals he believed himself to hold.

CHAPTER XXX

In 1913 their attention was once more diverted from the steady pursuit of the path on which they had set their feet. But this time it was not the rude shock of an election which disturbed them, but the coming of Con Og, a lusty son and heir. And now, just as the result of the election had driven them to look near home for an outlet for their energies, so the birth of Con Og encouraged them to persevere. For a long time this new joy overshadowed every other interest ; but in due course they became accustomed to the change it made in their life, though when they had no child they had believed that, if only they had one, nothing else would ever bother them again.

However, though Con let his imagination wander unguided over ways far removed from the place whereon he had lately concentrated it, the exigencies of the affairs of Rathcarrig did not allow him any respite from his daily routine. The only aspect of the new régime which he counted a personal drawback was the gradual substitution of the office for the fields and the woods as the scene of his day's work. Even as a mere farmer he had found it necessary to devote much of his evenings to time-sheets and to correspondence. Peggy's plea for evenings untrammelled by business had filched a reluctant morning hour from out-of-door occupations ; and finally the lime kiln and the sawmill made manual labour, except at the very busiest times of the year, a thing of the past.

Indeed, so overwhelmed did Con become with office work that the increasing confusion of ill-sorted papers which cumbered every part of the "sanctum," worse confounded by the loss of Peggy's help, drove him to set up a regular office in the yard, and to search out a young man as clerk to relieve him of some of the work.

Tomás Colman, the youth who defeated the host of local candidates for the position, was without qualifications for it, beyond a quick intelligence, never before set to work, together with a knowledge of Gaelic, now a *sine qua non* with Con and Peggy.

Tomás Colman's mother wit, though it enabled him very soon to pull his weight in the boat at Rathcarrig, was not equal to the formidable task of preparing the annual accounts. The month of May was in before Con could find time to attack them himself.

"I'm afraid I must break the rules to-night," he said to Peggy one evening. "I can't get time in the day to tackle last year's accounts, and if I leave them any longer, we'll not know where we are at all."

"I can help you for an hour or two," said Peggy. "Bring up the beastly old books here and we'll turn the 'sanctum' into an office again for a while."

Con went out to fetch the necessary books and papers, and Peggy slipped upstairs to steal a look at her beloved baby asleep in the cot above.

They set to. All went smoothly for a time and it looked as though they would actually arrive at tangible results that night, for they had no arrears of entering to deal with, and their object was only to discover the profit or loss they had made during the previous year and to make out a statement of their affairs. But this end was not so easily attained from the somewhat haphazard sort of books which Con had not yet superseded,

His system was the product of his own commonsense, for he knew nothing of accountancy. No doubt, if it had been scrupulously followed, entries always made at the right time, nothing left to memory, and tots made up and carried forward as the weeks passed, it would have served its purpose. But these things were not done—who could bother about his cash book when his hay was on the ground?

“I must stick at this till I get it right,” said Con, when their first puzzled inquiries had given way to utter mystification as to the whereabouts of the error which eluded them. Each account in itself appeared correct, yet the balances which co-related one account with another resolutely resisted their efforts to make them tally even approximately.

“Indeed, you’ll come to bed now,” said Peggy. “What good is it to be slaving half the night and complaining of a headache to-morrow.”

“I’m just on the track of it now,” said Con. “If I don’t go on I’ll have to begin all over again to-morrow. Besides, to-morrow is Sunday and I can sleep all day if necessary.”

Peggy grumbled, but gave in. She went to bed, and Con, having lighted another pipe, settled down to a determined onslaught on the recalcitrant figures.

He began systematically to check every tot from beginning to end. Several were wrong, he found, but the corrections brought him no nearer finality. He worked on, now certain that he had discovered in some silly oversight the error which baffled him, now utterly at a loss as to what course to try next.

At two o’clock a weariness fell upon him: his muddled brain refused to work any more without persistent goading.

“Tea’s the only thing,” he said, taking the lamp

from the table. "I suppose the kitchen fire is out, but tea I'll have if I take an hour to get it."

He worked on, allowing himself an interval now and then to replenish the fire he had kindled in the "sanctum," to knock out a pipe and fill another, or to drink more tea; and once he went out to look at the pale golden streak of the river in the first light of the rising sun.

His persistence was rewarded. One discrepancy after another came to light. He had before him, in the books he kept, all the data necessary to arrive at reliable results. It was only a matter of reducing chaos to order. The round of the clock had brought this about, and Peggy, when she came down the next morning, found Con picking out from the litter of papers any which he required to keep, and filling the waste paper basket with the accumulation of odd scraps, on which he had been jotting figures through the length of the night. The air of the room was oppressive with stale tobacco smoke, and Con, for all his triumphant manner, looked tired out.

"I'm finished," he cried exultantly, "and we have done better than we expected, what's more."

"Oh, I wouldn't wish for fifty times what profit we've made, that you'd be without your night's sleep like this," she exclaimed, "and 'tis as like as not you haven't it right yet. No one could see clearly after a night covering all that paper with figures. Will you have breakfast now?"

"I don't know," he replied, "whether I feel more inclined for bed or breakfast. I'll try both, I think."

Con went to bed at ten o'clock and slept till three; then he went back to his figures and made out a fair copy of his summary.

"This is what it comes to, Peggy," he said, after

taking a last look over it to verify his calculation. "We're making money out of Rathcarrig."

"What about it," she replied, "anyone would think we were on the eve of bankruptcy from the tone of your voice."

"Not at all," said Con. "I'm delighted that we are making good in what we set our hand to. In any case, we knew from the bank book that things weren't too bad without going into any accounts at all. No, I'm not worrying about that. Only what is bothering me is that our ideas about the co-operative commonwealth seem to have all gone to the winds."

"Perhaps they have," said Peggy. "I'm not sure that we're not on safer ground as we are."

"'Tis not like you to be troubling about safety, Peggy."

"You know I don't mean that. What I mean is that co-operative societies, as we know from experience, are too slow and cautious to take risks. Only individuals can be pioneers."

"Well, we have done the pioneer work now. The thing ought to be co-operative: not our property, I somehow feel."

As he spoke the door opened and Mary Lalor entered, looking as fresh and girlish as when Con had first seen her six or seven years before.

She was constantly at Rathcarrig and she had long ago abandoned the formalities of ringing the front door bell and waiting to be announced. Her appearance was especially welcome on this occasion.

"I was just on the point of saying," Con told her, "that we wanted you here to help us discuss the result of our annual accounts. And, lo and behold, you turn up at the exact moment."

"My ridiculous husband spent the entire night

scribbling figures on sheets of paper," Peggy explained. "No sooner has he woken after a few hours' sleep than he discovers that we have no right to touch the profits which we seem to have made."

"I hardly said that," Con protested.

"You implied it," said Peggy.

"Well, I do feel that, more or less," Con admitted.

"He doesn't see that the whole profit is due to his own labours," Peggy went on. "Who should be entitled to it if he is not?"

"Of course we're entitled to some of it," said Con, "but we've actually cleared four hundred pounds on the year's working, after deducting two hundred and fifty pounds as a reasonable salary for me. I had no idea it was so much until I went into the figures. The outlay on the new corn mill absorbed a good deal of it so that it was not so apparent in the bank balance."

"Put it into more productive schemes if you like," said Peggy.

"What do you want to do with it, Con?" asked Mary.

"It belongs to the men as much as to me, doesn't it?" said Con.

"That depends," said Mary. "If they get good wages I don't see what claim they have to any of it, as long as you work on the hired labour system at all."

"The wages are fairly good," was Con's reply. "The farm men and the other labouring men get fifteen shillings a week counting their perquisites in at a low rate. 'Tis as much as they get anywhere, I know. But it's the system I'm faulting, as you know I've been for ages now."

"You've already done a good deal in the way of innovations," said Mary. "Now is the time to make another. You've started three little industries in a

place where nothing was ever done before. You've introduced a weekly half-holiday which all the old-fashioned people I talk to regard as the end of the world almost. Why not flabbergast them completely by giving your workers a bonus on profits?"

"That seems a very tame suggestion," said Con, "but no matter. Let's see how it would work out. Supposing we say four per cent. interest on the capital we have invested. The lime kiln and the saw mill and engine and the grinding mill cost between them eight hundred pounds, that's thirty pounds, say. Then if we put aside two hundred and fifty pounds for further developments we have a hundred and twenty pounds left to divide up."

"You'd much better raise the men's wages a shilling or two a week and keep the whole four hundred over against a rainy day," said Peggy.

"Wait a while now," said Con. "A hundred and twenty pounds divided among ten farm men, three at the kiln and seven others: so that's only six pounds each."

"Are you not to share in the division?" asked Peggy. "And what about all the work I did. Con Og wasn't in it last year, remember."

"Well, say five pounds a piece if you like. It doesn't sound much."

"I bet the men would think it a fine lump of money," said Peggy. "It would mean some clothes for the children, the chance of buying a bonnav for themselves, and something left over to play with after."

"I suppose I'm a bit of a crank," said Con, after a moment's thought. "I would like to give a bonus of five pounds per man, but I'd like better to do something more original."

"What can you do?" asked Mary.

"About four o'clock this morning," Con said, "I went outside for a stroll to look at the sunrise: an idea suddenly came into my head at the top of the hill out there. I've not had time to think it out yet. I doubt if it's any use trying to explain it till I do."

"Go on," the two girls said together.

"I confess it seems rather startling even to myself now," Con continued. "However, 'tis something like this: in the first place, though I get on very well with the men and we have always avoided any trouble, even when the excitement over the Larkin strike was at its height, I loathe and detest the position of being an employer and a capitalist. I am a worker, just as much as any of the men I employ, I know, but I am not recognised as such by the outside world, even if our own men give me credit for doing my share. As long as I am an employer I can't be a 'worker.' So much for the personal aspect of the matter. Now as to the men. They work well and shew a great interest in the business of the place. They happen to, because we get on well and understand each other. But if they do, it's not due to the system we live under. On the contrary, that system gives me arbitrary power to dismiss a man I don't like, even if he is a good man otherwise. It gives them, of course, the counter weapon of a strike, if they're well enough organized; but they're not, and I doubt if they ever will be, especially in country places like this, where most of the employment—you know how little there is except an odd farmer's boy and the road men—most of the employment is just a few old traditional retainers on demesnes here and there. Our men work well, I grant, but that's only good luck. There's nothing in our wage system to incite them to work hard really."

"That's right," said Mary, "but let's have your idea."

"Let him get it out in his own way," said Peggy. "Whenever he has anything on his mind he always gets it off, but not without a good deal of preliminary talk."

"I'll never come to the point if you begin laughing at me," said Con, half piqued and half laughing. "I'm afraid you'll think I'm mad and I'd like to retain my reputation for sanity as long as possible."

"Don't mind us," said Peggy, "go on again."

"Very well," said Con. "Now the problem is to reconcile the interests of employer and employed and to make them one: to do away with the workers' feeling that they are being exploited, and to remove any doubt from the mind of the person, whom I must still call for the moment the employer, as to whether his men are doing their best for him." He paused and then plunged into the heart of his explanation. "The only way I can see is to carry out the spirit of the Gospel: 'Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor' does not mean sell out to some other capitalist, or present the proceeds to the Saint Vincent de Paul Society or the Association for the Prevention of Protestant Orphanages, or what not, and become a beggar yourself. It seems to me to mean that the haves should give an equal opportunity to the have-nots."

"What on earth are you driving at," exclaimed Mary. "Does he often verge on religious mania, Peggy?" she asked.

Con had embarked too far on the exposition of his new idea to be put off by interruptions of this kind, and he continued:

"I know well that it involves principles more revolutionary than anything we have any of us held hitherto, but I suppose nearly every accepted

principle in modern life was called revolutionary or fantastic at some time or other. To put it bluntly, the principle involved here means completely resigning my ownership of Rathcarrig."

"Heavens above!" exclaimed Peggy.

"Have sense!" said Mary. "Sure, you said yourself a while ago that it did not mean selling out."

"Nor it does. Listen now, the thing is becoming clearer to me even as I'm telling you about it. I'm feeling my way all the time. I give up my ownership of Rathcarrig. To whom? To the community. By the community I mean Tim MacDwyer, and Spellissey, Thady Comyn, Paddy Stack, Denis Conroy, and all the rest, and also myself and Peggy. Please don't interrupt me. I'm just getting into my swing. I'm hot on the scent. God knows you'll see flaws enough, no doubt, but keep your comments till the end. What was I saying—yes, the community. Now, as far as I know, a community of twenty-five or thirty people cannot own anything unless they are combined in some corporate capacity. Therefore, the first step would be to form ourselves into a co-operative or friendly society. I then make over the whole place to the society, whose property it becomes. The place would continue to be worked as at present; no doubt I would be elected president. I would consider the position of chief of the community would be far more honourable and far more influential than my present position as—what shall we say—a good employer. There would be a committee or council of a small number of men in whom the others had most confidence. They would act as a governing body. They would decide as to whether the present rate of remuneration as between one man and another on the place was fair. According to my plan, each week every

member of the community would receive a sum proportionate to his present rate of wages, not as wages, but as an instalment of his share of the proceeds of the place. In the accounts I now place my own salary at two hundred and fifty pounds a year. At that rate I would receive about five pounds per week as my instalment of the proceeds. If the council considered it too little they could increase my proportion, and similarly they could reduce it. The same way with all the members. At the end of the year the surplus, after providing for reserve fund, sickness fund and so on, would be divided between us all in the same proportion. I would lose something in cash perhaps, but I would gain more in relief from anxieties and responsibilities and in the esteem of my fellow men. I could go on developing it for an hour, I believe, but I see you are bursting, both of you, to have your say."

"It is magnificent, but it is not practical politics," said Mary.

"It is magnificent, but it does not take Con Og into account," said Peggy.

"As to Con Og," returned Con, "I'm not likely to forget him. In my opinion the chance of stepping into my shoes as president of the community would be a finer legacy than the lands themselves."

"He is to be the tanist waiting for his chieftaincy," mused Peggy. "Is he to inherit nothing beyond his share of what money you have outside Rathcarrig?"

"I wouldn't be for carrying the communal idea to its uttermost limits, at first at all events," Con replied. "I would retain personal ownership of this house, for instance."

"Does it not logically follow from that that Spel-lissey and the other men who occupy houses in the

place should become absolute owners of them ? ” was Mary’s next question.

“ I daresay it does,” remarked Con. “ I must think out that. But probably I might reasonably be allowed to make an exception in my own case, as regards the house, and to let the others hold theirs from the community. This would give the council power to expel any objectionable member if they could get a sufficiently large majority of all the members of the community to back them.”

“ We couldn’t be expelled, then,” said Peggy.

“ We could from membership of the community, but not from the house, if I persisted in my illogical intention of remaining the owner of it.”

“ I don’t think the idea is fair to Con Og,” said Peggy emphatically.

“ I tell you,” Con retorted warmly, “ I am as anxious about his future as you are. I would guard against the fiasco of a complete failure of the scheme: otherwise a breakdown would mean that the community would dissolve, first selling out the place and stock and dividing the proceeds. We would then have to buy our own place and get, say, one-thirtieth of our own money back ! I am not fanatic enough to contemplate that with equanimity. No, the deed of transfer to the community would provide that, in the event of dissolution, the place would revert to me or my heirs. So Con Og is safeguarded in case of failure. On the other hand, in case of success he has a future before him as chief of the clan, as you put it, which anyone would be proud of, and the only danger he would have to face would be repudiation by the clan. This would not be likely unless he were to turn out a bar-hanging shoneen, with a taste for living in London, in which case it would be right that he would not get Rathcarrig under any circumstances.”

"Con, you are a heartless and cold-blooded man and not fit to be a father," said Peggy.

"You will agree with me to-morrow all the same ; won't she, Mary ?"

"Possibly she may," Mary replied. "But now for my objections to your scheme. The thing is all right so long as Rathcarrig is a paying proposition. But suppose that instead of making money, as you have done last year, there was a loss on the year's working : who would bear that ? The poorer members of the community could not stand much reduction in their annual income."

"That's the rub," said Con.

"I daresay," Mary went on, "that the place will go on paying. If it pays now when the prices, etc., are not too good it should do better when, if ever, things improve. But they may get worse. I can't make out how you made a profit at all. Our land is quite as good as yours, if not better, and I'm sure we made nothing worth while out of it last year, though I don't sit up all night at accounts as you do and so cannot say very accurately."

"Yes," said Con. "I am coming to earth again. I have just remembered that on calculating interest on capital when we were working out the bonus I only counted the capital laid out on the new things. But I put in over a thousand pounds worth of stock and implements when I came here eight years ago. That at four per cent. is another forty pounds off the sum to be divided if we return to your modest ideas of a bonus. Then there was the purchase money of the lands. Probably the bonus itself will be whittled down to a few shillings apiece after all."

"That same would be something," said Peggy, relieved at the change in Con's mood

"I may have gone astray in the same way in my cogitations about my communal society," Con went on. "Still I have an instinctive feeling that I am on the right track. I feel happier in my mind now than I've felt for ages anyway."

"You're never satisfied," said Peggy.

"Amn't I after saying I'm as happy as a king," said Con.

"As a chieftain would be better," Mary suggested.

They laughed, and Peggy said :

"He's always striving for the unattainable. Before Con Og came along he used to say that all he wanted in the world was a son to pass on Rathcarrig to. Now he's going to give away Rathcarrig, and is addling his brains over who's to get it. You're a queer artist, Con. I can't imagine how I get on with you as well as I do."

"Oh, you've taught me to be a decent Irish speaker," rejoined Con, "that ought to make me a tolerable companion. By the way, we'll have a brush up and speak less English when that lad above gets a little older. He must be a native speaker whatever happens about his inheritance . . ."

CHAPTER XXXI

"Hello," said Peggy, "I thought you were in the meadow."

She turned with a surprised look of pleasure as Con came across the garden towards her. Scissors in hand, she was gathering flowers for the house. She wore a white muslin dress and a big straw hat, for the August day was hot, and as he looked at her Con felt glad that he had so far departed from his usual habits as to seek her out at that unusual hour of the morning.

"To tell the truth," he replied, "I had to leave the tramming of that field to Tim to-day—much as I hate not being there. William of Orange sent in to say that he'd like to see me at the kiln, if possible, this morning, so I decided to go right away and see what's his trouble now. We can go by the bog and see how they're getting on there with the clamping of the turf and on through the meadow to have an eye on that job too."

"You said we?" Peggy remarked.

"Won't you come with me?" Con asked.

"Of course I will," replied Peggy, "but 'tis so seldom you have time to go walks with me these busy times I hardly believe my senses. Wait a moment now till I leave in these sweet peas and I'll be with you."

"This isn't a walk, it's business," he said, as she hurried away

The bog within its encircling belt of birch trees sweltered with humid heat. They walked slowly, one

in front of the other, following the uneven path between the overgrown bogholes, which had been cut haphazard here and there by a less methodical generation and long abandoned in favour of a more scientific system.

They reached a kishoch and Peggy, who crossed first, waited on the far side of the dyke for Con to join her.

"I think the men's club will be a success," she said.

"It will," replied Con, "if they don't get tired of it by being over keen at first. Spellissey tells me that nearly all of them used it every night so far, playing cards and yarning and so on. Such enthusiasm of course can't last."

"What will we do to keep it going when the first flush wears off?" she asked him.

"I was thinking about that," he answered. "The club would give us a great chance of educating them on the subject of the communal scheme. Though I've not said much about it lately I've thought a lot about it since that Sunday last year when I first mooted it."

"How time passes," said Peggy reflectively. "That was fifteen months ago, Con Og was a wee baby then. The happier one is the quicker time goes."

"Yes," said Con, "we are lucky to have such a pleasant life."

"'Tis too good to last," she said.

"Why, what is there to spoil it?" he asked.

"I don't know, really," she replied, "something might happen Con Og: or we might find ourselves in the middle of a civil war."

"Or even a real war from the look of things," said Con. "But, after all, whatever happens I don't see

that it will affect us. I want to get on with my communal idea, and the Club will give me a chance of introducing it gradually. We can have evening lectures during winter, and any I give can be devoted to a study of communism in ancient Ireland and in other countries in modern times."

"You don't seem to be in your usual fuss about business to-day," Peggy remarked. "We've been standing here nearly five minutes and you've made no move to hurry me on."

"Somehow, I don't feel nearly as much interested in work as usual," Con rejoined. "But on we go. Look out for that hole beside you."

The dark brown clamps of turf loomed up before them, and as they neared the scene of the work they stopped a moment to admire the vivid reflection of blue sky and green branches in the golden brown water of the open bogholes.

"Will England go to war at all?" the men asked them.

They were met with the same question at the lime kiln where King Billy, as they called the dour citizen of Newtownards, almost forgot his complaints about the bad quality of the last load of culm in his anxiety to demonstrate to them his hatred of the Kaiser.

"The air is charged with excitement even here," said Con, as they left him. "What must it be like in cities. I loathe this upsetting episode, but I can't go to work in the meadow, still less in the office to-day."

"Let's walk to Gortroe and see have they any news," Peggy suggested. "Dick Keane might know something."

The walk was hot and the road dusty, but they reached the cool shade of the Gortroe beech trees about lunch-time.

Dick Keane met them on the steps. "England has declared war on Germany," he told them.

They both stood still upon the bottom steps dumb-founded by the news, even though they had half expected it. A few drops of rain began to fall from a dark cloud they had noticed as they approached Gortroe, but they made no move to go in, and Con gave no thought to his half-saved meadow.

"It won't make any difference to us," he said doggedly.

"The whole thing will probably be over in a few weeks," said Dick Keane. His voice was husky with excitement. He was, for once, profoundly moved by the doings of the outside world. Of late Con and he had drifted somewhat apart: there was no misunderstanding or suggestion of unfriendliness between them; it was simply a fact that their friendship had not ripened into intimacy as it might have, despite their disparity of age. Keane, who thrilled at the prospect of Britain being involved in a European war, whose traditions made him feel without a moment's hesitation that it was his war, had no sense of Irish nationality at all. Con, on the other hand, was consumed by it; and even then as they stood talking on the steps he felt that this new and unparalleled event would separate them still further.

"It may be over in a few weeks," Keane said. "But if it's not, Con, it means that external influences will dominate us in spite of ourselves."

"Good-bye to my castles in the air, so," said Con, "but," he added, "I don't believe it."

"I told you in the bog a while ago," said Peggy with a sigh, "that the happiness of our lives here was too good to be true. The trouble has come now. I knew something would happen to upset it all."

CHAPTER XXXII

Very faint were the reverberations which reached Kildeely from the European commotion, already colossal in its dimensions. It had averted for the moment the catastrophe which threatened to overtake Ireland, and for a little while it brought peace to a land where war had seemed imminent.

It soon became evident that the great attempt of the German autocracy to overthrow the British dominion of the world, and to set up another supremacy in its place, was to involve a struggle which might be brought to a conclusion not in months but in years. But the process of metamorphosis from the normal conditions of peace to those entailed by a world war was a slow one: at first Kildeely observed with indifference the gradual rise of prices and shortening of supplies as it watched without ardour its handful of recruits depart to their place of training.

Kildeely felt no enthusiasm for the war, nor did it show any. The men who volunteered for service were regarded without prejudice as people following the call of adventure or deliberately taking a personal risk in order to alleviate the hard circumstances of a long poor family. For a while Kildeely was theoretically pro-Ally, a mildly interested spectator; more than neutral, less than partisan.

To Con it seemed from the beginning to be a war of Empires, a contest in which small nations had no interest beyond opportunism: the chance of liberty

as an ultimate result of a great upheaval. His attitude was more genuinely neutral than that of the people of the district, his outlook more impartial. The great onrush of the German Armies towards Paris and the brilliant exploits of the British Fleet left him equally unmoved : he felt no disposition to throw his hat in the air as he read of the retreat from Mons or of the dash into the Heligoland Bight. Only once did Con experience anything approaching a desire to take part himself. The report issued by the Bryce commission, as unbiassed a body of men as could be found in the credulous and uncharitable times of war, fired his chivalrous instincts. He could not but believe some at least of the statements made ; and the stories of outrages on women made his blood boil and his hands tingle to do his share in punishing the offenders. He had none of the exaltation of a man who would fight for his country, for he thought of the war as one waged not on behalf of Ireland, even indirectly, but against Prussia. Had he enlisted in the fight it would have been half as crusader or knight errant, anxious to avenge a wrong not done to himself or his, half as soldier of fortune reluctant to stay at home in safety while his fellow men on both sides were daily taking their lives in their hands. But his responsibilities at home were such that he could not lightly put them on one side and go off to offer himself as a recruit without producing consequences almost disastrous to people who were dependent upon him for their living. The cares of Rathcarrig were too heavy to place upon Peggy's shoulders, who had her own domestic sphere to attend to, and was without any special aptitude for business matters ; Mary Lalor was occupied with her own affairs ; Spellissey was old and failing in health and the others, however useful they were in looking

after their own particular duties, were quite unfit to take charge of the whole place for an indefinite time ; perhaps, if he should be killed, for the long years while Con Og was growing to manhood. Rathcarrig could not be maintained upon a separation allowance or a widow's pension.

So passed Con's only impulse to become a soldier in the European war, and with its passing he re-assumed his earlier attitude of dogged determination not to let the war interfere with the development of his plans for the future of Rathcarrig. If he had any tendency to become obsessed by events in Europe his mind could not but have been recalled forcibly, in one exciting moment, to his own corner of Ireland : for one night soon after Christmas the sky was bright for miles around with the light of his burning hay.

A vague curiosity seized him after putting out the "sanctum" lamp before going to bed. He went to the window, still quite casually, to discover the cause of the faint glow which reached him where he stood. In a moment the truth, or a suspicion of it, flashed on him, and he rushed headlong from the house. He reached the haggard. Everything was now as clearly distinguishable as if it had been day. Spellissey and Tim MacDwyer were there before him, gazing helplessly at the leaping flames. As Con hurried across to where they stood Thady Comyn came running after him.

"I was up looking for you to bring you out," he explained breathlessly.

Con decided without hesitation that to attempt to save any part of the big block of hay in the hay barn was a hopeless task. He felt quite cool. There was a definite danger facing him to be coped with, and the need for quick action never failed to steady his nerves.

He would become flurried and anxious when he was uncertain about the end to be achieved, or if he had a long period of waiting in which to become self-conscious. But he was never at a loss for a means to an end when the end to be achieved was itself undoubted. That winter's night the desired end was as clear as the unnatural light which cast its dancing shadows on the ground around them. They must save from the flames as much of the winter food supply as they could, and they must prevent the conflagration from spreading beyond the hay barn to the smaller ricks and to the buildings of the yard hard by.

Con was not long in making up his mind that the risk of the fire reaching the farm buildings was not sufficiently serious to deter him from making an effort to save the two small ricks of hay at the leeward end of the burning hay barn. Beyond these stood the cornstacks, neatly built upon their old-fashioned stone pedestals, awaiting the coming of the thresher in February or March. This was his seed corn and feeding for the latter end of the winter, almost irreplaceable except at an enormous cost. To avert the loss of these the fire must be kept at all hazards from the intervening hayricks, and to this end Con devoted his whole energies.

A crowd had already collected, appearing from nowhere, as spectators do on such critical occasions. But Con would have no sightseers in his haggard on that night. The breeze whistling between the iron roof and the top of the hay was driving the flames forward along the barn towards the danger spot with agonizing speed. They had now travelled fully half the forty yards or so of its length.

Con roared to the knots of people to gather round him for instructions, and they ran towards him as he

screamed to them a second time. Tim had already been dispatched hot-foot to the dairy for buckets, and Thady to the toolhouse for forks and strong ropes.

"Listen here to me," Con cried to the men and boys who clustered around him, "I mean to save those cornstacks and it can be done if ye do what I tell you and work like mad. Are ye game to try?"

"We are," came the response from twenty throats.

"I knew that," said Con. "Keep cool now and carry out my instructions exactly. Is that Bill Mack? It is. Well, run in and get the ladder, Bill, quick. Everything depends on speed. Now," he went on, as Bill flew off on his errand, "I want ten men for the next job. Any ten. Don't be rushing off now. I'll take the ten first on my left hand side here. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Range yourselves out in a line from the drinking pond to the end of the hay barn. Two on the ladder when Bill brings it. See to that, Spellissey. Let them pass the buckets along the line, and Tim can stand on the top and swish water all over the last bench. I'll go up with him as soon as I have the other job going. 'Twill be hotter up there later on. Off ye go now and don't get excited."

He paused to see how many men remained to carry out the other part of his plan. About fifteen or twenty, he estimated. He heard Tim's and Thady's quick footsteps as they returned from the yard and a minute later the ladder was in position and the buckets began to be passed from hand to hand as he had directed.

"What'll we do with the ropes and forks?" panted Tim MacDwyer.

"We've to knock the two cocks before the fire reaches the last bench of hay in the barn," said Con. It was a desperate remedy Con proposed. He did

not know if it would succeed, or even if it would be possible to carry out his intention.

The rope was passed round the circular cock of hay at its widest point, another was tied to it to make it longer, and Con disposed his fifteen helpers upon the line, ordering a steady pull to be put upon it with the object of dragging the cock over. The cock was well built, with no tendency to lean over in any direction, and the four months since it had been made had hardened the hay into a firm mass, resisting their efforts to stir it as resolutely as a rock. The steady pull gave way to frenzied jerks, till at length one wrench more violent than the rest resulted in the sudden breaking of the rope and the collapse of the excited workers in a confused mass upon the ground.

Nothing daunted Con. He tied up the broken rope, and reinforcing it with others twisted them all together into a solid cable. He thanked Providence that the felling of some heavy timber had induced him to buy a really strong rope, without which his present undertaking would have been hopeless. While the cable was being placed in position he hastened across to the other gang of men, only to find to his horror that the flames had so far advanced as to make Tim MacDwyer's position on the top of the hay almost untenable.

" 'Tis well soaked, anyway," Tim called down to him from out of the smoke.

" Stick it out as long as you can," cried Con, " but don't get smothered."

He flew back to the cock. They bent again upon the ropes. Again without result. There was nothing for it but to call over the other men and this he did. The accession of strength provided by those eleven men gave him new hope just as he was becoming despondent.

" 'Twas I did the trick," cried Spellissey comically, as they surveyed the shapeless mass of hay which had a moment before been a shapely, well-made cock.

" Damn you, this is no time for coddling," Con snapped. " We're a long way from finished yet," he added loudly to the sweating men.

" We'll knock the other cock," he announced.

Success had loosened many tongues. A dozen suggestions were forthcoming from a dozen quarters.

" Get the horses to pull it over," said one.

" Horses ! " repeated Thady Comyn with contempt.

" The devil a much you know about horses if you think they'd work for you in this heat and . . . "

" Silence," Con roared. " Fix the rope as before."

The second cock was on the ground, and the great danger lay no longer in the darting tongues of flame springing from the main rick to the smaller ones, but rather in the flying red-hot lumps which once were hay now being lifted by the wind from the great molten heap of fire and borne like glowing lamps through the air towards the cornstacks. Con had hoped that he might be spared the necessity of ruining the well-saved hay which was as yet untouched by the fire, but it soon became evident that this would have to be saturated with water to prevent the conflagration spreading further, so the buckets were again requisitioned, the last of the bounteous season's crop sacrificed. Barrels were rolled out and placed beside the corn stacks, and with water from these, eager watchers were able to quench the little fires which broke out in the stacks as the flying embers lighted upon them here and there. For one breathless moment a leaping flame seemed to have seized the largest stack, but a well-aimed bucket of water subdued it, and all heaved a sigh of relief as it became

evident that their long, frantic labours in the fierce heat had not been in vain.

A few of the men lingered on in the devastated haggard long after there was any need of their assistance. As the night advanced towards dawn the wind died down and the rain began to fall, but Con and Thady Comyn were still there while the first streaks of dawn glimmered through the rainclouds to eastward. The twisted girders and crumpled sheets which so recently had been the roof of the hay barn were gradually revealed to them in all their hideous starkness, while on the ground a great heap of soft grey ashes smouldered under the falling rain, occasionally bursting into a sudden spasmodic little flame as some bit of hay not yet completely consumed was eaten up by the red-hot embers in the heart of the debris.

" 'Tis a wonder Tim didn't stay on with us," Con remarked, when at length they turned to go in to breakfast.

" I wouldn't wonder," said Thady, " if Tim got into trouble over this."

" How trouble ? " Con queried, uncomprehending.

" Well, the fire didn't start itself, this day of the year," said Thady.

" Of course not," Con replied, " but what has that to do with Tim ? "

" Sure, the hay was burned by someone," was Thady's response.

" I don't know what you're saying," said Con, " surely to goodness you don't mean that Tim did it."

" I do not," answered Thady. " But maybe he knows who did. He was like a madman when I saw him last : cursing and swearing and talking to himself he was. Wait awhile now, sir, wait awhile.

There'll be queer things doing over this—you see if there don't."

They had not long to wait.

At dinnertime Thady came in with the news that Tim had been arrested on a charge of having that morning beaten and grievously hurt Jack Hanvy. Con and Jerry-Ned were asked to go bail for him, a service which both rendered without hesitation. Tim, when he returned to work, was not communicative, but he assured Con that it was Jack Hanvy who had set fire to the hay. He admitted that he had no proof, but he persisted in his assertion, adding that Hanvy deserved a beating on several counts, and had been bringing it on himself by his conduct towards Con, especially at the time of the election some years before. The debt though long unpaid had not been forgotten.

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It was clear that Tim MacDwyer had got himself into serious trouble through over-zealous championing of Con's cause, and it was with some misgivings that Con made his way to Killeely to attend the Petty Sessions court where Tim's case would come before the magistrates. An anxious week had elapsed since the fire, spent by Con in endeavouring to secure fresh supplies of hay for his cattle, no easy matter in a district twelve miles from the railway, and one, moreover, in which the buying and selling of hay in any quantities was unknown; and it was already obvious that the insurance company were not amenable to pay him for the damage done. They had insisted on his making a claim to the county for "malicious injuries," and this course Con was loath to adopt, for it offended his pride.

Con found the business of the court already in

progress when he arrived. A considerable number of people had gathered in the room, expecting to have in Tim MacDwyer's case one of exceptional interest ; but despite the crowded state of the room, way was made for Con at once, for he was regarded as one of the principal personages in the drama.

Con was surprised when he observed that the Resident Magistrate was not present. Mr. Willoughby was in the chair, and the other magistrates present were Ambrose Hctor, Peter Paul Vahey's father, and Dick Keane, who had been released from the army more on the grounds of his value as an agriculturist than from any loss of his usually robust health.

" You state that you assaulted Hanvy because he set fire to Mr. O'Hickie's hay," Mr. Willoughby was saying to Tim MacDwyer.

" I do," he replied.

" Are you aware that that is a very serious charge to make against any man ?" the chairman went on.

" I am," said Tim.

" Even if he did," Mr. Willoughby continued, " it would not justify you in committing what is shown by the evidence we have heard to have been a very violent and savage assault. But if you can prove the truth of your allegation it might alter the view of the bench as to the gravity of your offence."

" Indeed it might then," echoed old Vahey.

" What evidence can you produce," Mr. Willoughby inquired, " to support your statement ? "

" I know well he done it," said Tim laconically.

" Come, come," said Mr. Willoughby, " don't trifle with us. What are your reasons for making this charge ? "

" Everyone knows Jack Hanvy has a grudge again' Mr. O'Hickie," said Tim.

The chairman was on the point of making an angry exclamation when Dick Keane intervened.

"Excuse me," he said. "Now, MacDwyer, speak up straight and tell me did you see Hanvy around the rick."

"I did not, sir."

"Did you hear him say anything about the hay at all then?"

"I did not, sir."

"Then why do you think he burned the hay?"

Tim hesitated.

"Tell me now what did he say," Keane insisted. "Tis no good your keeping anything back."

"'Twas this way, sir," Tim began, as if suddenly deciding to make a full statement. "Jack Hanvy was inside in Hoctor's—I disremember which day it was now. Mr. Hoctor—Mr. Henry Hoctor—that was serving drinks, for the place was full and all the boys he has were busy and Jack Hanvy had his share in. 'Twas reported that Mr. O'Hickie said that all Redmond's men had a right to join the army and that Peter Paul Vahey should be the first to go. Anyway, Hanvy had the story, whether 'twas the right of it or not, and he made out that 'twas an insult to our member of parliament and to the place and all to that . . ."

"Well, what about the hay," Keane interrupted him.

"There was nothing about that," said Tim.

"You said just now," the chairman remarked, "that Hanvy had sworn to be even with Mr. O'Hickie. When was that?"

"Last fair day was a month," replied Tim.

"Oh, this is outrageous," exclaimed Mr. Wiloughby. "He is wasting our time. The assault is

admitted. The only question is whether we shall sentence the prisoner or send on the case to the assizes."

"My son's name has been dragged into the case," said old Vahey. "For my part I would recommend that we deal leniently with this man."

"In an indirect way I may also say I am affected too," came the pompous voice of Ambrose Hctor. "I therefore join with Mr. Vahey in counselling clemency."

"Look here," said Keane suddenly, "why don't you join up, MacDwyer, and I am sure the magistrates will overlook your offence, serious as it is."

"I wouldn't care to do that, sir," was Tim's response.

"Oh, very well," snapped Mr. Willoughby. "Gentlemen, this is a case for the assizes without question. You may expect a long term of imprisonment as a result of your obstinacy, MacDwyer."

"Oh, my God," came the voice of Tim's wife from the back of the court.

"Your wife and family will be in a bad way," said Keane.

"Now, gentlemen, what do you say?" asked the chairman.

"Well," said Ambrose Hctor, "in my opinion Major Keane has made a very fair proposal which I think we shall adopt. Let him join the army and we'll let him off, otherwise the consequences are on his own head."

Tim's face wore a perplexed look, and he rubbed the back of his head with his hand once or twice before he spoke again.

Con was anxious to let Tim know that he would promise to look after his wife if he was sent to prison,

but before he could make up his mind how best to communicate with him Tim said suddenly : " I'll join the army for the sake of me wife and family. Mind you, gentlemen, I have no wish to be killing anyone."

" Except Jack Hanvy," exclaimed a voice.

" And I have no great wish for the British Army," Tim went on, " but I'll do it and ye all know the reason why," he added, half turning towards the listening crowd.

" You must join the Connaughts," said Keane, highly pleased with his morning's work. " You'll find them Irish enough."

And so the Irish Division gained a recruit and Con lost a valued workman.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Con's obstinate refusal to satisfy the conditions which the insurance company demanded of him by claiming damages from the County Council for "malicious injury" resulted in a very serious financial loss to himself. Some two hundred and fifty pounds had to be withdrawn from his reserve fund before he could replace the seventy tons of hay he had lost. He was also deprived of his right hand man on the farm, and no cash payment could replace him. He felt a certain grim satisfaction when he thought of the bruised and battered state of Jack Hanvy's carcass, for he believed as firmly as Tim MacDwyer that Hanvy was the author of his troubles; though Con did not credit Hanvy with courage enough to have done the deed in person: he suspected that a Killeely corner-boy had been bribed by drink, supplied by Hanvy in Henry Hctor's shop, to carry out the work which they were themselves too cowardly to attempt.

He was occupied for three weeks in restoring normal conditions in Rathcarrig, not only upon the farm, which alone of his enterprises was directly affected, but in the mill and the lime kiln also; for these two had been seized with an inexplicable sympathetic disorganization. After three weeks he and Peggy drove away to pay one of their occasional week-end visits at Fitzgeraldstown. Mary Lalor was as usual one of the party.

Mr. Fitzgerald, intent upon producing a less strained relationship between the O'Hickies and their

neighbours, had asked Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby to dinner in the belief that the war had largely dispersed the atmosphere of mutual distrust which surrounded them, and that it had united people of a widely different outlook in a common purpose.

Certainly Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby, who had deigned to rub shoulders with the Hectors and Willie Andrews upon a committee charged with the duty of providing for Belgian refugees, adopted a less frigid manner on meeting Peggy, while their demeanour towards Con was pleasant enough, if not cordial. Con and Peggy, of course, had no desire to be unpleasant, and the party sat down to dinner, therefore, without constraint.

The nature of Mr. Willoughby's first remark to Con, however, showed Mr. Fitzgerald that the friendliness of his ill-assorted guests was but a thin veneer, powerless to withstand the scratches of any controversial subject which might arise. They had been speaking of the progress of the recruiting campaign in Killeely, and Mr. Willoughby had expressed surprised though rather grudging gratification at its success.

"It wants very little to make them do their duty," he said. "Look at that man, MacDwyer, for example: he might never have gone but for getting into trouble in connection with the burning of Mr. O'Hickie's hay. Keane showed considerable tact and sense when the case was before us. By the way, O'Hickie, I have heard it said that you do not intend to make any claim for damages under the Malicious Injuries Act. I presume this is one of Dame Rumour's habitual falsehoods."

"It is quite true," said Con, rather shortly.

"I would much like to know," Mr. Willoughby

continued, "what company you insure with. I did not know that any of them paid claims of this kind without putting the insured person to the trouble of first making a claim on the county."

"The company I insure with," Con replied, "is no exception. I am not likely to receive any compensation for my hay."

"Then why in the name of goodness," Mr. Willoughby ejaculated, forsaking his usual precise manner in his surprise, "do you not claim for malicious injury?"

Con hesitated a moment before replying. He would have preferred any subject to this for discussion. "I don't know that I can explain my motives very clearly," he said. "I cannot bring myself to do a thing which would put me on a par with the obnoxious persons who make up the bulk of the claimants under this Act. I would rather lose my year's profits than see my name in the list among land grabbers and ranchers and extortionate landlords."

Mr. Willoughby gasped, but before he had time to speak Mary remarked: "I appreciate your point of view, Con, but according to your theories of the responsibilities of property you are depriving your work-people of the money you could claim. It is their pockets rather than yours which will be the lighter for your—fad, as I am sure Mr. Willoughby would call it."

Mr. Fitzgerald was not satisfied with the turn the conversation was taking, and he interposed a remark designed to carry it into a channel where calmer water might be found.

"You mentioned Tim MacDwyer," he said. "I happen to know him: he carried my bag when I was shooting with you before Christmas, O'Hickie. I

thought him a fine type. Did he join the Connaughts or the Munsters ? ”

“ He was simply driven into the army,” said Con with unnecessary surliness. “ He told me he let them put him down for any regiment they bally well wished.”

Con was feeling unreasonably annoyed with old Willoughby for his scoffing interrogation about the insurance claim, with Mary for her untimely thrust at his inconsistency, and with himself for being so easily put out of temper. Mr. Willoughby’s manner increased in suavity as Con’s became blunt.

“ I fear,” he said, “ that Mr. O’Hickie has misjudged MacDwyer. An excellent man, in my opinion, as his action in volunteering to fight for his King and country attests. Somewhat hotheaded, no doubt, as so many of our young men are, but the army will soon give him the discipline he lacks and he will make a splendid fighting man.”

“ He had discipline enough under me in Rathcarrig,” Con muttered.

“ Indeed ! ” said Mr. Willoughby, as his eyebrows went up. “ He seems to have indulged in a considerable lapse in his treatment of Hanvy.”

“ Tim beat Jack Hanvy,” said Peggy, speaking for the first time, “ out of loyalty to us. A quieter boy I don’t know than Tim MacDwyer.”

“ If loyalty is a characteristic of his,” Mr. Willoughby rejoined, “ he could not be in a better place than in His Majesty’s army. A sense of loyalty to the crown and to properly constituted authority is what these people lack. A year or two’s soldiering makes a wonderful difference for the better in them.”

“ Our member of parliament is a young man and physically fit, I understand,” said Mr. Fitzgerald. “ I believe he has not yet joined the forces, nevertheless.”

"No," said Mr. Willoughby, "that is true. But for my part I am most agreeably surprised in that young man. He has been doing splendid work, addressing recruiting meetings and helping in every way he possibly can."

"Except by doing what is called plain duty in the case of ordinary individuals," Mary commented.

"Some men can do more good at home than by shouldering a rifle in France," said Mr. Willoughby. "I repeat I am agreeably surprised in Mr. Vahey. There are many who can be spared before there need be any question of members of parliament going. I sincerely hope that conscription will be introduced. It would be a godsend if the disgraceful slackers one meets everywhere were made to do their duty."

"It is so dreadful to see all the young men in the Dublin shops," Mrs. Willoughby remarked. "I cannot bear to be served by them; they are so unpatriotic."

"What's the war for?" Con asked suddenly of no one in particular.

Mr. Willoughby took upon himself the responsibility of answering that tremendous question. "I cannot understand," he said, "a man in your position making a remark of that kind. I am glad to say a large proportion of the nationalist population understand their duty. I thought it was only the most ignorant farmers and a handful of poets in Dublin who ranged themselves upon the side of the cowards and shirkers. I begin to suspect that your attitude is not what it should be, O'Hickie," he added with severity.

"I am sure it's not," Con replied cheerfully. "Let me say at once that, as you can see, I am of military age and physically fit. It is not because I

am engaged on necessary war work (though I suppose I am, as a matter of fact) that I am a civilian, but because I cannot get a satisfactory answer to the question I asked just now: what is the war for?"

"Primarily to put an end to militarism," said Mr. Willoughby.

"And to deliver the small nations from bondage," put in Mrs. Willoughby.

"Certainly, my dear," said her husband. "As Mrs. Willoughby remarked, we are at war on behalf of the small nations of the world to uphold the principles of liberty and justice, and we are determined to show that right shall prevail over might, whatever it may cost us in blood and treasure."

"His daily leading article," Mary whispered to Con.

"Have you not forgotten the sanctity of treaties," Peggy inquired innocently.

"That is part of our purpose," Mr. Willoughby replied. "I am glad to see that Mrs. O'Hickie takes a broader view than Mr. O'Hickie," he added.

"I take a saner view," said Peggy. "He is too anti-German to be described as broadminded. But to return to the sanctity of treaties, Mr. Willoughby, what about England's treaties with Ireland?"

"To what do you refer?" asked the annoyed old gentleman.

"The Treaty of Limerick and the Renunciation Act of 1782, for example," replied Peggy.

"Ancient history," said Mr. Willoughby.

"Then don't you think past wrongs ought to be righted?" Peggy persisted.

"Our immediate concern is to right the great wrongs of the present time," Mr. Willoughby replied.

"In that case, if you don't recognise wrongs when

they become historical, it is no use talking about restoring Alsace Lorraine to France or Schleswig to Denmark," said Peggy. "Or Poland to the Poles or, of course, Ireland to the Irish."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Fitzgerald, "that Ireland is very much in the hands of the Irish at the present day. We must look facts fair and square in the face and be honest with ourselves."

"This is my idea of the facts of the situation," said Mary. "First of all, I believe that German militarists deliberately provoked the war. There you will all agree with me, no doubt."

"I don't," said Peggy, who was in combative mood. "I think England provoked it by first forcibly possessing herself of every corner of the globe worth having, and then flourishing her Union Jack flag in the face of the rest of the world with her supercilious, hypocritical one-Englishman-is-better-than-two-Germans manner."

"Englishmen are rather superior," said Mr. Willoughby, "but you are in a minority on the question of who was responsible for starting the war."

"As usual, I interrupted Mary," said Peggy.

Mary continued: "Well, assuming that the Germans started the war, and that England was forced into it, I think it is equally obvious that there has been a whole lot of hypocritical cant talked about Belgium and small nations generally. England's real motive seems to me to be self-preservation. I dare say Mr. Willoughby will dissent from that."

"I do, most certainly," he said

"Anyhow," Mary went on, "whatever we may think of those points I would say that it is Ireland's interest to go in with the Allies. So I am glad to see that so many have recruited. But it is quite clear to

me that Irishmen are not fighting for small nations, Ireland among them. They are fighting on behalf of Ireland in this war only because England is powerful and will continue to be so, and therefore it is good policy to propitiate her."

"If we gave our last man," said Peggy, "we'd only be asked why we didn't send the women too. You're wasting your time if you're looking to England for justice."

"Perhaps," Mary responded, "but I fancy it will be good policy to be on England's side, and after all it is the better cause, though I agree it is not a case of one side absolutely all white and the other absolutely all black. Now, the British government is obviously not very keen on Ireland shewing up well in recruiting. They make anti-Irish Unionists into recruiting officers and stamp out every bit of national sentiment that the Irish troops try to introduce."

"For example?" Mr. Willoughby interposed.

"Oh, not allowing the Irish division to receive the colours which had been worked for it. You saw what a snub General What's-his-name got from the War Office because he tried to be a little Irish in that matter. Irishmen would recruit much more readily if they could take part in the war without being obliged to become mere members of the British Army, their traditional enemy."

"I rejoice at all the obstacles which are put in the way of Irish recruits," said Peggy. "I do not want to see a single Irishman losing his life in the war, except as a soldier of a recognized Irish army."

"I am rather glad of them, too," said Con, "but not for the same reason as Peggy. For my part I have become more and more convinced that war is wrong altogether. I am a sort of pacifist, in fact,

though I don't think I would act up to my principles if I was personally affected. I dare say I wouldn't. Wars are made by kings and autocrats, and peoples are slaughtered by well-paid ministers who direct the murder from comfortable armchairs."

"Ridiculous," Mr. Willoughby ejaculated.

"I would like to see Ireland come out of the war having won the moral victory which would be gained in my opinion by abstaining from fighting, and by resisting all attempts to make us become soldiers whatever it might cost. If we ever become independent I would hope to see no Irish armaments whatever: a despised small nation setting the example to overbearing empires."

"Would you refuse to fight under any circumstances, like a Quaker," Mr. Willoughby asked him, his voice expressing his disapproval and disgust.

"I am afraid I would be inconsistent," Con replied. "I can imagine circumstances in which I would fight. I can even imagine myself fighting against England, but I am a very unmartial person."

"You are not one of those mushroom Nationalist Volunteers?" Mr. Willoughby queried.

"I was for a while," Con answered, "but I dropped out."

And so they debated this question almost interminably, Con and Peggy giving vent to opinions more extreme perhaps than those they really held; Mrs. Willoughby horrified at being in the society of disloyal pro-Germans, as she called them; her husband fanning the blaze with his questionings, and their host ever and anon striving to turn their talk on to a more harmonious topic.

They were still at it, going over the same ground for the tenth time, when Mrs. Willoughby announced that it was time for them to be going home.

"Those O'Hickies are an impossible pair," she said to her husband, as they settled themselves in the luxurious motor, which war conditions had not obliged them to abandon. "I am surprised at Mr. Fitzgerald consorting with such people, painfully surprised, and I am even more astonished at the patient way you bore with them."

"No doubt you are," replied Mr. Willoughby. "But I had an object, my dear. They are not only impossible socially. They are actually dangerous. Such doctrines expressed in a private house are without doubt obnoxious. But you may be sure they instil this poison in a much more violent form into the many ignorant people with whom they come in contact."

"One is a pro-German of the worst kind and the other is half a pro-German and half anarchist," said his wife. "But what was your object in bandying words with such intolerable people?"

"I intend to speak to the County Inspector about them the very next time I meet him at the club," he replied. "I was anxious to have chapter and verse for the rather surprising story I shall have to tell him,"

CHAPTER XXXIV

Though Peggy delighted in having the opportunity of shocking Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby's orthodox respectability, Con felt some regrets that he had allowed himself in the argument to say rather more than he meant. Neither of them, however, suspected for a moment that the owner of Rivervale would seriously consider it his duty to mention them to the county inspector of police as a danger to the stability of the British Empire. They may have known that Mr. Willoughby often met that denationalized official at the club, but it did not occur to them that they would earn a special dossier in the files of Dublin Castle as a result of a chance smoking-room conversation over a whiskey and soda.

Such was the case ; but they were personally unaffected by the fact that they were now suspect in the eyes of authority. Indeed, after a year or so they had adjusted their lives to the altered conditions produced even in remote places like Kiltelly by the war, and Rathcarrig became again a quiet, industrious centre of country life. The burning of the hay had further postponed the development of Con's communal scheme, which had been almost forgotten in the first excitement of the war. But a bonus had been actually paid on one year's working, and the sawmill and the limekiln continued to do a steady and profitable business.

The scarcity of cheap imported foodstuffs drove Con, before government orders enforcing compulsory

tillage were heard of, to break up more land with the object of producing at home all the provision needed for his cattle. As the spring advanced the farm assumed once again its rightful position as the most important undertaking within the walls of Rathcarrig. Con himself entered into the tillage operations with zest and with more personal attention than he had found it possible to give to the actual details of any outdoor work for several years ; for Tomás Colman, after three years' training in the half-loft, half-office, above the toolshed, was able to relieve Con of much of the necessary indoor work ; he had become a competent clerk and assistant to Con, and to emphasize the importance of his position he had adopted a style of dress—Norfolk jacket, brown boots, and signet ring—which no hints from the more homely foremen, Spellissey, Conroy and William of Orange, could influence, nor did Con's persistent ridicule produce any noticeable effect upon him.

It was a late season, and though April was nearing its end much of the extra acreage of the tillage still remained to be sown. All the horses of the place were being worked to their utmost, and every available man was engaged in the potato fields.

"If to-morrow's a fine day," said Con to Colman one night as they were leaving the office, "you'd better dig out your old clothes, if you have any."

"Very well, sir, the reason being ?"

"That you've to be up and out at six o'clock and to blazes with the office for one day. You needn't mind your buttonhole to-morrow, or your collar either, for that matter," he added, going on to explain the nature of the morrow's programme.

The next morning gave promise of a perfect spring day, and Con went to the yard at six o'clock as

arranged. Colman, almost unrecognizable in clothes resuscitated from his pre-personage days, was there before him, a bucket in one hand and a number of bare twigs under his arm.

"Yerra, them little kippins is no use," said Con contemptuously. "Come on and we'll get some right ones in the woods going up."

On their way to the field Con cut eight or ten bushy branches of holly.

"Did you ever shake oats, Tomás?" Con asked him.

"I did not," Colman replied. "We're more up to date in my part of the country, 'tis all the seed-drill we use."

"If you had," Con went on, "you'd know that a man can't see a bare stick, like the ones you had, half way across the field."

He showed his clerk how to mark off the first courses to be seeded. They carried out the two sixteen-stone bags of oats which had been left overnight for them at the headland, and deposited them in convenient positions in the middle of the field. Con then put on an apron which he had purloined from Peggy's press and the work began.

"We must hurry," said Con, as Tomás brought him the first bucket of the seed and poured it into his apron. "The harrows will be here by eight o'clock and we must have an acre done at the least before they begin or we'll not be able to keep ahead of them."

Tomás delayed him a little for the first few courses, keeping him standing while he went to replenish the bucket, or causing him to stop to alter the position of the kippins. But very soon the clerk understood how to move them across as Con advanced along the furrows, so that they were correctly placed for the

return journey ; and before old O'Brien and young MacMahon appeared with their horses and began to follow in their wake with the levelling harrows Tomás had learned when he could most advantageously spare a moment to refill his bucket at the bag, and how to do this quickly without spilling the seed in the process.

As they worked, the crows collected upon the field, coming up from the rookery below, first in twos and threes, and then in numbers so great as to threaten bare patches in Con's carefully sown field.

Con stopped work for a minute to frighten them away with yells and throwing of stones.

"I've enough shaken for a while," he said to Tomás. "We'll go back to breakfast."

They hastened away, a keen edge on their appetites. The shouts of the horsemen as they encouraged their teams and the excited cawing of the crows, already returning to their plunder, followed them down the road. Con looked at Colman's feet and said with a laugh : "I advise you to throw off those shoes. I'd take my oath they're full of clay and oats already. If you'll be said by me you'll put on a pair of strong boots and fasten in your trousers with bicycle clips or twine. There's no need to make a penance of this grand day."

When they returned to the field the harrows had covered in all the seed which Con had scattered before breakfast. The ploughmen were enjoying a few minutes rest, puffing at stumpy pipes, their horses picking the young grass which was already beginning to grow at the headlands under the shelter of the craggy walls. The crows were busy on the reddened land making a glorious meal of worms and grubs and such grains of seed as were still exposed after the track of the harrows. Along the middle of

the field was a row of plump sacks, brought up from the yard while Con and Tomás were at breakfast, and waiting to be spread upon the big stretch of red-brown field which still remained to be seeded.

"'Twill give us enough to do to finish by six o'clock," said Pat O'Brien.

For a couple of hours the work went on without interruption, save once when Con stopped to shoot a crow, more voracious and more brazen than his comrades ; his carcase, hung upon a stick, served as a warning which the others treated less cavalierly than futile shouts and stones. Wayfarers upon the road going from Killeely to Keownstown hailed the workers cheerily as they passed by ; the sun shone and the breeze blew lightly ; the uncovered part of the field dwindled in size and Con felt that it was good to be alive on such a day.

He stopped at the headland near the road. His apron was empty of seed, and Tomás for once in a way was not at hand to replenish it. He saw Tom Owens, the Keownstown car driver, coming up the road, and he leaned over the boundary wall to pass the time of the day with him before setting to work again.

Tom pulled up his horse abruptly. Omitting the usual preliminary greetings he began to pour out a torrent of words in a voice which shewed him to be at once half stupefied and intensely excited.

"Was the like of it ever heard," he cried. "You'll scarce believe me, but I have it from the guard of the railway train. The volunteers are out in real earnest. They have Dublin taken—every place in it worth having, I believe. There's a warship belting at Liberty Hall from the Liffey, and British soldiers pouring into Ireland as fast as ships can bring them.

'Tis said there's risings in Cork and Galway and some says in Belfast too. Limerick is quiet, I know, so far. There's nothing going on as usual : trains, telegraphs, and all is stopped."

This breathless narrative left Con speechless with amazement. He could not but believe that it contained at least a considerable proportion of truth. It was too wild a story to have been invented by Owens for a joke, though this was Con's first momentary impression ; but the car driver's excited and important manner was too natural to have been assumed, and proclaimed the fact that he was the bearer of strange and unexpected things.

As Tom Owens was speaking Colman joined Con, and in a minute the two ploughmen had left their teams standing in the middle of the field, attracted by something extraordinary in Owens's loud words and vehement gestures.

" My God," said Pat O'Brien, when he grasped the full meaning of Tom's story, " them fellows must be mad : pure, stark, staring mad."

" 'Tis damn little good they'll do, only bring trouble on the people," said Mick Kennedy, who joined them at this moment, on his way to Kilteely from his farm on the mountain side. " To bring trouble on the people," he repeated, " and they contented and prosperous in a way was never known in our times, nor before us either."

" Speak for yourself," said Tommy MacMahon's brother, " 'tis the farmers is coining out of this war and no one else." There was a feeling in Rathcarrig of antagonism to Mick Kennedy, though its origin was now remote, dating from the election and before it.

In general, however, spleens were at least temporarily forgotten under the stress of astonishment produced by the news.

"We should all be in this, by right," said Tomás Colman, half to himself.

"You're talking foolish, young man," said Kennedy.

It suddenly occurred to Con, on hearing Colman's remark, that their sawmill foreman, Denis Conroy, had gone to Dublin for a couple of days Easter holiday. He was a leading member of the small band of Irish Volunteers which had repudiated the larger and less earnest body soon after the outbreak of war. Clearly he was in this fight. Con reflected that his absence probably meant that there would be no attempt at a rising, or even a demonstration, in Kiltelly. But he said nothing of what was passing in his mind. When he spoke it was to reprove both Kennedy and Colman. "I'm afraid," he said, "that this business is a mistaken move. 'Twould be ridiculous to take any part here without arms or ammunition or food preparations or anything. If you were to go out now, Tomás, you'd break some windows in the police barracks and perhaps kill a misfortunate peeler or two. In a couple of days you'd be starving and have to be robbing the farmers' houses to keep yourself alive. Risings are no good unless they're carefully planned: so don't be doing anything rash. But this business in Dublin is a different matter. It must have been well thought out if what Tom Owens says is true. I hope to God they'll put up a good fight. Rightly or wrongly, they're out now against the British Empire. 'Tis a mistake I think, but I can't but admire their courage in going out."

"There'll be no fair in Kiltelly, after to-morrow, when there's no trains," Mick Kennedy grumbled in a querulous tone.

"Damn the fair," exclaimed Con with sudden violence. "Who the devil cares about whether you

sell your couple of half-starved yearlings, when what's probably the biggest thing happened in Ireland since '98 is actually going on at this minute. My God, 'tis an awful thing to feel one's sympathy with them and one's reason against. Listen, Mick, I don't want to say a word against your cattle or anything else of yours, but just remember that 'tis your own countrymen are fighting on Irish soil for the sake of Ireland. These men are sacrificing more than a few calves, for they're bound to fail. They must know they can't hold out for more than a week or two at most."

No one had anything further to say, for the subject was without parallel in their experience, and opinions were not yet formed in thunderstruck brains. Tom Owens whipped up his horse and drove on towards Killeely, anxious to carry his news further afield.

"We can do no good by standing here," said Con to the three men when Owens and Kennedy had departed for Killeely. "Rising or no rising, the crop must be put down, and this day is too fine to lose. Come, get a move on."

For the rest of the day Con worked mechanically, walking up and down the field between the lines of holly sticks, tired feet stumbling towards sunset wherever the ploughs had left uneven furrows and tired brain revolving for the hundredth time futile speculations upon the progress of events in Dublin. As he went home he wondered would the crop when it appeared as a green carpet upon the field bear witness to his abstraction by brown vacant patches where no seed had fallen from his hand.

CHAPTER XXXV

The daily toll of death which the suppressors of the rebellion thought fit to take, a gruesome record read by the people morning after morning in the newspapers, produced in the minds of the dwellers in Killeely, and indeed throughout Ireland, a sense at once of depression and a savage exasperation. Popular resentment against the government was fanned to angry but impotent hatred as the huge army of occupation, which had been drafted into the country, swept over the land with all the ostentatious paraphernalia of war, and carried off from farms and shops and labourers' cottages such men, young and old, as the police asserted were guilty of complicity in the outbreak, or at least of dangerous sympathy with its object. If mere sympathy constituted guilt none were taken who were not deserving of deportation and imprisonment and many such were left behind. But there was little method in the wholesale arrests and little semblance of justice in such method as there was.

All through the disturbed times which preceded the rising Con had eschewed politics and had intentionally cut himself adrift from participation in public affairs of any kind. He had taken no part in recruiting, even before what the Prime Minister of England described as the stupidity, almost the malignity, of the British War Office made it impossible for any Irishman of spirit to associate himself with it. As he

became more pacifist in his outlook he gradually dropped out of the volunteering movement, feeling, as he did, unable to put his whole heart into it. He had become more than ever convinced that his sphere of usefulness lay not in the movements which attracted the majority of his countrymen, but in quiet and unostentatious work upon his own place at Rathcarrig. His ideals for the regeneration of the country—his idea of a new godly rural industrialism, his scheme for a co-operative community, and his hopes for the revival of the language—seemed to offer him more than field enough for his activities, and he at least counted them more worthy of his devotion.

But he was to learn how true were Peggy's words when she said to him: "Everything you say, Con, would be right enough if we were living in normal times. But we're not. You cannot escape from the outside world now. If you think you can, you are only an ostrich burying your head in the sand."

She had made this remark a week or two before Easter, and now, a month later, they were surrounded by soldiery, and were even in danger of arrest at any minute, for their sympathies were well known, though no overt action could be laid to their charge.

Indeed, one night their forebodings seemed to be justified. The household was in bed about half an hour when the descent was made upon it. Con was lying still wide awake, thinking over the morrow's work, and ever and anon letting his mind wander in idle speculations on the ultimate results of the rising. Through the open window he heard a corncrake winding his watch in long, intermittent spells of monotonous sound. "The summer again," thought Con as he started on a new train of reverie.

His musing was suddenly cut short by a sound

outside. He sat up in bed, his senses all alert. Undoubtedly it was a footstep on the gravel. Peggy who woke up with a startled intuition of something impending, heard it too. They had no time to take counsel together, for a moment later a loud banging upon the front door reverberated through the great half-furnished house, and, as the sound died away, they heard in the peaceful silence which followed the faint tinkling of a bell in the distant kitchen. Con ran to the window and looked out. The dim light revealed two figures standing at the doorway. A little distance away a number of people appeared to be standing in a straight line upon the soft grass beyond the avenue. The cornrake had ceased his rattling.

As Con leant over the window-sill one of the forms at the front door raised his hand and dealt several sharp blows upon it with his stick.

"Who are you and what do you want?" cried Con, no trace of welcome in his voice.

"Come down and open the door, and let no one leave the house," a voice replied peremptorily.

"Tell them go to the devil," exclaimed Peggy savagely, when Con communicated to her the answer he had received.

"Wait a minute," Con shouted through the window.

"What good is it to cross them?" he said to Peggy as he struck a match. "If I don't let them in they'll smash in the door."

"Let 'em," said Peggy. "I wouldn't give them any satisfaction."

"Don't you think it would be better take them easy," asked Con. "They'll destroy all before them if we annoy them too much. I wonder are they come to arrest me."

"I suppose so," said Peggy, becoming alarmed.

"Look, Con, I'll put on some clothes and open the door for them. Let you creep out of the garden door and give them the slip. They'll not touch me : you can depend your life I'll mind myself."

"I will not," replied Con. "I wouldn't trust them. I'll take my chance, and besides they are sure to have the house surrounded."

Peggy gave in reluctantly, seeing that Con was determined to make no attempt to escape. As he hurriedly pulled on his trousers over his pyjamas the sound of hammering upon the front door again echoed through the house.

"You'd better dress yourself," said Con as he went out of the room. "These blackguards will come up here as like as not. Maybe if you remain in bed they'll think we have rifles hidden in it and pull you out. If they do that I am afraid they'll have a good case against me for assault, if not manslaughter." He chuckled grimly at the thought as he went downstairs.

Con unlocked the front door and threw it open. Two officers in khaki accompanied by two policemen entered the hall.

Con addressed them defiantly : "Well !" he said.

One of the officers turned to the policeman. "Is this Con O'Hickie ?" he inquired.

"That's my name," replied Con, without waiting for the policeman to answer.

It was the other officer who spoke next. "We have received orders," he said, "to search your house for arms which are believed to be secreted here. I trust you will place no unnecessary obstacle in our way. Such action on your part will do you no good."

Con was induced by the comparative civility of the elder officer's tone to reply with less hostility : "You

can search the place from top to bottom but you'll find nothing in it. I would request you to omit the nursery and my wife's bedroom from your search. I give you my word of honour that no arms or ammunition are hidden in either of those rooms."

The two officers consulted together for a few moments.

"We must make a thorough and systematic search," the younger man told Con.

"I regret the necessity of disturbing your wife and children," the other added almost apologetically.

"Call in a corporal and six men, Sanders," he added to his companion.

Then began an opening up of disused rooms and a probing of dark corners so meticulous, yet in reality so cursory, that Con and Peggy were hard put to it to keep from laughing. The improbability of Con's arrest, since he was not taken into custody at once, so filled Peggy with relief and joy that she could watch with equanimity the rough usage of the furniture and the damage done by the thrusts of the less polite officer's sword in her most private presses and cupboards. Con, too, was relieved at the prospect of continued freedom, but he felt his ignominious position keenly and longed for an opportunity to show Peggy that he was not the meek weakling he felt himself to be, forgetting that she knew him better perhaps than he knew himself, and that nothing he might do on that night was likely to affect their relationship in any way.

It took two hours steady work to convince the officers that further search was hopeless. They left no part of the house unvisited from attics to cellar, for they had been told most positively that the O'Hickies were really dangerous people and Rathcarrig a centre of sedition. The frightened maid-servants

were huddled in a group in the kitchen in various stages of undress ; Con Og and his brother roared in the nursery resentful of the disturbance in their night's rest and refusing to be coaxed back to sleep ; the soldiers who were on duty outside the house shivered at their posts in the night air.

Considerable delay was caused by the discovery in the damp, cavernous cellar of a large cylindrical flower vase, an unappreciated wedding present long since relegated to this unseen corner.

A glint of light from the lantern he carried reflected by the unwieldy vessel drew a sudden exclamation of surprise from one of the raw conscripts who made up the bulk of the search party. He instinctively stepped back from it as from an unknown danger.

"Wot's up with you?" inquired the corporal.

"There's something in that corner there," replied the youth.

"Well, let's see what the blooming thing is," said his superior.

The private advanced hesitatingly, holding his lamp before him. "Er do look like a bomb or summat," he said nervously.

The other half-trained boys showed no disposition to examine further the corner in question, but assumed a sudden diligence in investigating again the part of the cellar which had already proved to be empty of infernal machines.

The corporal looked more closely at the vase.

"Yon's a queer article," he said in a doubtful voice.

No one seemed willing to handle the mysterious object. It was examined by the scanty light of the lantern and a hand lamp.

"What is this?" the younger officer inquired of Con, indicating the still undisturbed flower-pot.

"I couldn't tell you," said Con, who had forgotten its existence and had not looked at it closely.

"My Aunt Jenny's wedding present," whispered Peggy, hardly suppressing a giggle.

Con's answer and the muttered conversation which followed it still further mystified the suspicious soldiers. One of the policemen, a man from the local barracks who knew that Con was not a man to harbour explosives in his cellar, despite the official estimate of his character, came to the rescue. He coolly lifted the vase from its dusty corner and dropped it upon the stone floor. It broke to pieces harmlessly.

Peggy laughed, and there was a suspicion of a guffaw from the second policeman.

"Why the devil didn't you tell us what it was, sir, and save our valuable time?" said the officer to Con with obvious chagrin.

"'Tis not our business to do your detective work," said Peggy.

"You'd better be careful what you say," snapped the lieutenant.

Con and Peggy talked far into the night after the soldiers had left the house. They had taken away as booty an airgun and an antiquated revolver. Fortunately, Con's shot gun was not in the house and was therefore not forfeited.

"'Tis a wonder," said Peggy, "they didn't spend the whole night digging holes in the stables and cow-house to see had we a machine gun hidden there."

"That captain chap wasn't such a bad sort," Con remarked. "I felt quite friendly to him when he more or less apologized for having disturbed us."

"The other fellow was a pig," said she. "But anyhow you're too soft. A few polite remarks would get round you. You forget these people are our

enemies. What right have they to come turning one's whole place upside down in the middle of the night when we never did anything to justify it. I begin to wish we had, the way things are going now."

"Oh, I suppose," Con replied, "they can't be expected to know who's who in a strange land. They're rattled for fear the rebellion would break out again."

"Nonsense, they have the police to give them all the information they want about people. And how could another rising happen when they have every bridge guarded and machine guns in every village?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Con. "Let's go to sleep. I have to be up for the bell in a couple of hours."

CHAPTER XXXVI

The next morning no bell rang. Spellissey had been seized with a sudden illness and in two days he was dead.

The wake was a very quiet affair. The determined effort of the bishops and clergy to put down the old semi-barbarous customs which attended death had had considerable effect. Father Hehir during his time in Kilteely had waged fearless war upon drinking and unseemly hospitality at wakes, and his campaign had left its mark though he himself was not there to carry it on. The clay pipe was still a feature in the proceedings, but tea had taken the place of whiskey, and quiet, sober people sat around the walls of John Spellissey's kitchen, now and then exchanging a brief word about the dead man's character and habits, and perhaps discussing for a while in undertones the recent raid upon Rathcarrig House, or occasionally going in ones and twos to pay a short visit to the room where the corpse lay.

The funeral, however, was very large. Spellissey was to be buried in a graveyard near Barnagweeha Chapel, one of those many places of interment which are scattered all over the country, and wherein the right of burial is reserved from generation to generation to certain families. The population of Ireland is not a shifting one, and the same names are to be found in a locality throughout the centuries.

The dead man's popularity was proved by the long string of cars which followed the coffin on the hilly

road to Barnagweeha. Every class was represented from Mary Lalor with the old-fashioned carriage and pair, which was still brought out for funerals and weddings, to Jack Hanvy on the dilapidated ass car not yet sold to provide him with the porter upon which he almost lived. Henry Hctor was there with his smart turn-out; strangers had come over from Keownstown, and the many who had no conveyance tramped the seven miles to the graveside on foot.

When the simple ceremony was over the people remained standing about in groups, reluctant to start upon the return journey without a preliminary gossip. The stirring events of the past few weeks gave food for endless talk, and the day, fine and all though it was, was lost now for work.

Con and Peggy joined Mary, who was chatting on the roadside with old Jerry-Ned and one or two of the Rathcarrig men.

"Poor John will be a great loss to you, Mr. O'Hickie, the Lord have mercy on him," said Jerry-Ned as they came up.

"He will, indeed," Con replied, "and I fancy we have another loss, too, besides him."

"Who's that?" asked Jerry-Ned.

"Denis Conroy. You know the foreman at the sawmill."

"Of course I know Denis Conroy, why wouldn't I? Wisha now, do you tell me anything has happened him, the decent poor man."

"I am afraid he's dead," said Con.

"The saints in Heaven preserve us," exclaimed the old farmer. "Is it to die with the fever or something he did?"

"No," said Con, "I think he was killed in the rising."

"Wisha, bad luck to them that brought the trouble on the country, God forgive me for cursing," cried Jerry-Ned.

"Who do you mean by that?" inquired Mary.

"Faith I dun' know," replied the old man. "I'm thinking the greater share of my curse should fall on the government for all the hanging and shooting they're after doing and for being in it at all, for that matter. But I put some of the blame myself on them cracked divils of Sinn Feiners who can't let the country stay quiet when it is. Sure, 'tis only foolishness to be standing up again' the British army."

"You've changed a bit, Jerry-Ned," said Con, "since the day you voted for me in the election long go."

"I have not, 'tis ye are changing all the time."

"How are we changed?"

"Didn't you make out then that fighting was no good and now aren't you making heroes of the men that died in Dublin."

"Begob I believe we are then, the divil a lie in it," said Pat O'Brien, the ploughman, who, dressed in his Sunday suit, made one of the party.

"Who's making heroes of 'em?" cried a voice, which proved to belong to Alban O'Brien, "what heroes! a handful of playactors," he said, scornful as always.

"Be damn, Alban, 'tis no playacting to stand up again a wall and be shot," said Tommy MacMahon, who was also among the listeners.

"'Twas the price of them, anyway," Alban asserted.

"You're not fair to them, Alban," put in Mary, "they were honest men and did what they thought was right."

"Dreamers and schemers, Miss," said he.

" Dreamers if you like, but not schemers," she replied.

" And where'd you be, Miss Mary, or any of you that has land? You couldn't be sure of holding it for a fortnight if them fellows was in power with the fighting and arguing would be in it. I've read books about the French Revolution, and 'twould be the same story over again here, in my opinion."

" You're an old Unionist, Alban," said Peggy.

" Maybe I am and maybe I am not," he replied. " Have it your own way, ma'am. I makes it a rule of me life never to argue with a female."

" Nobody minds Alban," said Jerry-Ned apologetically.

" I have a letter here from Father Hehir," Con told them. " He doesn't say much, but as it is about this matter you're talking of you might like to hear what he says. This is it," he continued, taking a sheet of paper from his pocket.

" ' The rising,' he says, ' though it failed, as it was bound to do, is the best thing ever happened Ireland. There is no one now who does not realize the existence of the Irish Nation. Ireland has declared herself to the world, and has taken the only means she could avail of to draw the attention of the world to her case. That is so much to the good. But what is far more remarkable is the sudden and amazing rebirth of the spirit of nationality in our people at home. At least this is strikingly evident here, as I suppose it is with you. Pearse was right in his conviction, which you may remember we used think morbid : a sacrifice of individual lives was necessary to save the life of the nation as a whole. This rising though it has had deplorable immediate effects has saved the soul of Ireland. God grant that this revitalizing of spirit will be permanent and not prove a mere transient phase.' "

"Bravo," cried Jerry-Ned. "'Tis Father Tom's the great little man. 'Tis a woful shame he ever was moved out of this."

"He's a fine speaker, I grant you," said Alban, "but I wouldn't say but his tongue runs away with him sometimes, more's the pity."

"You're never done faulting people," said Pat O'Brien.

"I am a class of a fellow that speaks out me mind fair and straight," Alban retorted.

"Faith and you are so," Pat assented, his melancholy sing-song voice somehow drawing a laugh from the bystanders.

"I am going to commence learning Irish," announced Tommy MacMahon rather diffidently, after a pause.

"You'll not be able," said Alban, "Allowing that you've brains enough, which God knows you've not, the Irish language will be surely suppressed and made illegal."

"We'll all learn it so," cried several young men.

"Well, there I leave you," said Alban.

"What have you against the Irish?" asked Mary, "hadn't your father and mother it?"

"They had," he replied, "but as for meself I was reared among gentry, as you may say. I know better than to meddle with such things. Here," he exclaimed, "I must be getting home to me old shanty. I don't hold with all the rebellious talk ye have now: a pack of rebels ye are—begging the quality's pardon," he added laughing, with a bantering look at Mary and Con.

"Stick to what you said just now, Tommy," Con said to the young man. "And get all you can to join you. We might start a class in the club perhaps."

"Father Hehir is right," he remarked to Peggy with conviction as they drove homeward down the mountain side.

"The new spirit has come to stay," she said.

"I trust so," he replied, "but Alban was right too in one thing : I fancy the heavy hand of coercion has come to stay too. I only hope it will not go too far and force us to kick against the pricks. Politics is becoming a national affair and ceasing to be a matter of party. I dread getting drawn into it, I greatly dread it, but unless something unexpected happens I am afraid we'll all have to be in it now if we're worth anything. I've no wish to land myself in gaol. I'm too keen on you and the kids and on starting our community idea. It would be dreadful if we were forced to do something which would put an end to that."

"You will be guided to do the right thing, Con," said Peggy, with a sudden revelation of the childish faith she had never lost.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Though Con tried to disguise from himself the true significance of the course of events, he knew well that it had become as impossible for any man of spirit to remain indifferent to public affairs in Ireland as it was to be oblivious of them. The time had come when it was necessary for a man to be unequivocally upon the side of the people of Ireland or upon the side of the garrison. Con had no hesitation in making his choice. It was, indeed, inevitable ; for during his twelve years at Rathcarrig he had been moving steadily towards a position to which circumstances now offered him no alternative, unless he was perpared to make a complete *volte face*. But it was not a mere desire to be consistent, nor was it anxiety to retain the popularity he had won among his neighbours, it was the firm conviction that his country was both ill-treated and misunderstood which caused him to throw in his lot unreservedly with the people at this crisis.

It was not without some heartburnings and even some misgivings that he did this. In the past he had always had beside him good friends with whom he could take council : if he had erred he had erred in congenial company. Now he stood alone, with only Peggy for ally. In pre-war days when his impossibilism consisted of nothing more unpardonable than membership of the " Roman " Church, a belief in nationalism and a tendency to socialistic ideas, Dick Keane had been his friend and helper ; but now

Keane had discovered himself to be an imperialist, had condemned the Rising as criminal insanity, and had actually obtained a commission in the British Army. Mr. Fitzgerald's innate conservatism had taken fright at the growing demand for complete separation from the British Empire, and his conversion to Irish-Ireland ideas, which had seemed so certain, was still unaccomplished ; for a barrier had sprung up between them, felt rather than expressed, already threatening to jeopardize a friendship which Con had begun to value : how highly he only knew when he realized with a pained shock that he was in danger of losing it. Father Hehir was with them without reservation, but he was bound to his work at the far side of the diocese and intercourse with him was possible only by correspondence. Even Mary did not go all the way with them, though at first she had seemed to think as Con and Peggy thought. She was influenced to some extent by her other friends and by her surroundings, and the strength of her traditions combined with a genuine horror of the foolish acts of extremism which are an inevitable part of every revolt against government without the consent of the governed, frightened her and drove her to take her stand on principles of philosophical aloofness such as Con had preached in the days when thought rather than action had been the immediate need of the country.

Thus Con and Peggy, harassed by the industrial difficulties and by the deliberate spitefulness of police officers, officials, and all who were interested in the continuance of the existing régime, found themselves gradually isolated from their friends in a greater or less degree. But any inclination Con may have felt to return to the point of view now held by Mary Lalor, to regard politics as of secondary importance, and to

apply himself whole-heartedly to working at the revival of a distinctive national entity on the old quiet lines was not allowed to grow. Hardly a day passed but some fresh example of militarist government roused his indignation and resentment. Now it was the prohibition by proclamation of harmless sports and recreations, here a hurling or a football match, there a *feis* or *aeridheacht*; now it was the tragic death of Thomas Ashe in Mountjoy Prison or the killing of young Russell by the bayonets of soldiers sent down to repress the people of Clare; again, he was amazed by the political pronouncements which many judges thought fit to make from the bench, and profoundly moved by the palpable bias of their judgments—by such a travesty of justice as that which could sentence a youth who had taken part in hillside drilling to two years hard labour, while in the same court the judge was not ashamed to ascribe his leniency to consideration for another prisoner's services to the cause of recruiting when he sentenced him (for what he himself designated most brutal manslaughter) to but one year's detention in the first division; while in the great world outside Ireland the universal recognition of the right of other small nations to determine for themselves their allegiance and political destiny, though each had their own "Ulster" standing in the way, and the forcible withholding of that right from Ireland, drove him to desperation when he thought of the prospects of peace in the future.

Father Hehir wrote telling Con how he found himself becoming callous, almost unmoved by the events which even a rigid military censorship could not entirely exclude from the newspapers: he felt, he said, incapable of the sensations of horror and indignation, much in the same way as a soldier finds

himself becoming careless of personal risk after a few days or weeks of perpetual danger.

No doubt, to Con, this state of mind might have come also, had he not experienced more intimately the things of which Father Hehir heard but tidings. Con had already undergone the unpleasantness of a truculent midnight search for arms ; he had half expected arrest at any moment, though perhaps without much justification ; he had lost friends ; and the industrial and social work to which he had devoted his life seemed to him to be in danger of ruin. Fate placed him in the thick of the struggle of which Father Hehir was by comparison a mere spectator, and the cheerful resignation of the priest's outlook was therefore impossible to him.

Nevertheless, Con was by nature law abiding and of a retiring disposition, anxious to discharge conscientiously his duties as a citizen and reluctant to draw attention to himself by creating disturbance or challenging authority : reluctant to make sacrifices not clearly demanded of him, yet neither coward nor laggard. When, therefore, he felt bound to take a prominent part in openly defying the powers which were determined to govern Ireland according to Prussian ideas he acted not as a light-hearted boy attracted by the lure of excitement and adventure, but as a steady-minded man of thirty-five having nothing to gain personally and all to lose.

But it was not until the simple act of singing a national song at a concert in Kilteely had brought upon Tommy MacMahon a heavy sentence with hard labour that Con finally cast his scruples to the winds and publicly threw in his lot with the party of " sedition."

Con and Peggy were in the " Sanctum " when late

one night Tommy MacMahon's brother came to them, hot-foot from Limerick, with tidings of the sentence.

"My God," exclaimed Con, "that is the last straw."

"I feel I'd like to shoot some one," cried Peggy.

"'Tis no use getting into a fury," said Con, whose tendency to become angry was always counteracted by Peggy's uncontrolled outbursts of indignation.

"Nothing seems to annoy you much," she said, venting her feelings, as excitable people do, upon some person innocent of the cause of the trouble.

"This does," he replied, quietly; but there was an unwontedly determined expression on his face as he spoke.

"To think of a nice, decent boy like Tommy being treated as if he were the worst of common criminals," she continued, less petulantly, "and he such a great Gael now."

"He used to be a hail-fellow-well-met, easy-going kind of a fellow," said Con, "the last man anyone would expect to hear of going to gaol for a political offence."

"Two years hard labour," said the solemn voice of Mick MacMahon, whose presence they had almost forgotten, "is enough to kill any man but the very hardiest at the best of times. Two years hard labour with the food that's in it now would kill a man dead."

Peggy went out with the weary travel-stained workman to get him some supper, and Con, left alone in his comfortable room, sat staring into the fire with a blind rage in his heart.

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To follow Con's life further in any detail would be to become involved in the burning political questions of to-day. When arrest came, it came swiftly and without warning. His determined and uncompromising action in the face of the imminent menace of conscription had not only transformed him from a peaceful citizen into a leader of contingent rebellion, it had made him also a danger to the State in the eyes of the Government, and as such he was seized at the dead of night and carried away into captivity.

His story is the story of many Irishmen, drawn against their will into the vortex of destructive politics, deflected from constructive activity by the effects of the political system upon their lives as individuals, and the greater the work of one man in the service of the nation the more certain his distraction from the personal to the public sphere. As Padraic Pearse left his educational work and James Connolly his labours on behalf of the masses, so Con was taken from his plough and his mill and from his gropings towards a newer and a better rural life. Con went later than they, and being less prominent in the public eye and having a less heroic part to play, his going was less conspicuous; but the causes which brought him, uncharged and untried, to an English prison differed in no essential from those which earned for the bodies of Pearse and Connolly their final resting place in unhallowed quicklime.

Let us no longer quote the ancient poet: they went out to battle and they always fell. Such words in modern mouths are the language of despair; they belong to a passing generation which could take pride, aye, almost pleasure, in cherishing its misfortunes. Such morbid self-pity is not for us. The men of our generation may have fallen and may be

falling yet, but the work that they have done lives after them. Ireland has learned in the bitter school of experience that real freedom can be won not so much by political action as by laborious regeneration from within : by discipline, by effort, and by thought ; by sacrifice and a strenuous endeavour rather than by lip-service in the pursuit of shadows. Now shadowy political nostrums have given place to something solid, based on a solid foundation. The causes for which Con's support was won by the various influences of his life, from being the fads of a few cranks and enthusiasts, have become in little more than a score of years the main arteries of the revitalized life-blood of the nation. The rebirth of the nation is now an accomplished fact, and our ultimate freedom, even though it come not now, is assured.

As to Con, we leave him in gaol, untried and unsentenced, and therefore uncertain of the duration of his confinement. At home Peggy suffered tortures of fear lest the lung which pneumonia had left weakened ten years or so before would give way and that Con would return to her a wreck. Such things have happened. They are part of the price which has to be paid for freedom by the less favoured small nations of the world. Everything was uncertain. Con knew well that if his deportation did not keep him from work for too long a period he need not contemplate the fate of Rathcarrig with despair. The men of Rathcarrig had learned under him the meaning of discipline, and the fact that he had succeeded in maintaining it without injustice to individuals or undue favour was guarantee enough that the system he left behind him would continue to work in his absence. But he knew also that he was himself the mainspring of the mechanism : the hands would

move so long as the clock was wound, but eventually it would run down and then

"I wish to God," Con said to himself as he impatiently paced his narrow cell, "we were allowed to work out our salvation—or even our damnation—in our own way. Then a man could work positively and not negatively for Ireland. All our striving to get rid of outside interference is a ghastly waste of time. As it is, our fight is not to reach the top of the ladder, but to get our feet on the bottom rung. We are fighting to reach our starting point, not our real goal."

When an opportunity for conversation next occurred Con expressed his pent-up feelings to another Irishman, who, like him, had been deported for political reasons.

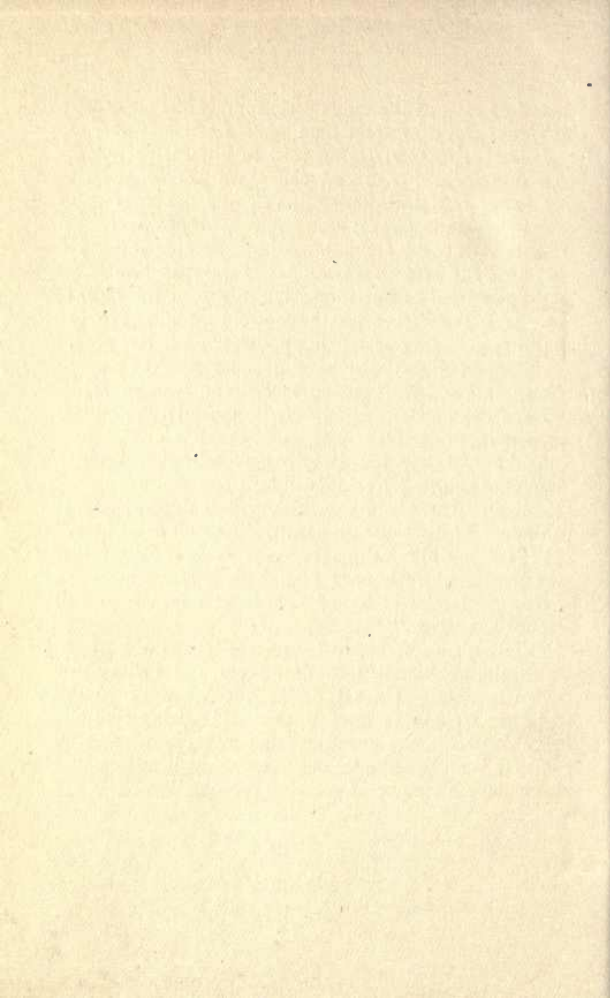
"When we get out," replied his fellow-prisoner, a sanguine youth, "Ireland will be a free country."

"I doubt it," said Con. "I often think the most of us are wasting our time outside as well as in here."

"Not at all," was the reply. "Each of us did just what we were in honour bound to do: and so we're here. Ireland will soon be free and then things will right themselves."

"I don't know," said Con. "Perhaps things are not quite so cheerless as they seem, but believe me, when we get out we'll find plenty of work to do, whether Ireland is free or not. An Irish republic doesn't necessarily mean an Irish millenium."

"No," replied the young man, "but it means that we'll have a chance of working for one."



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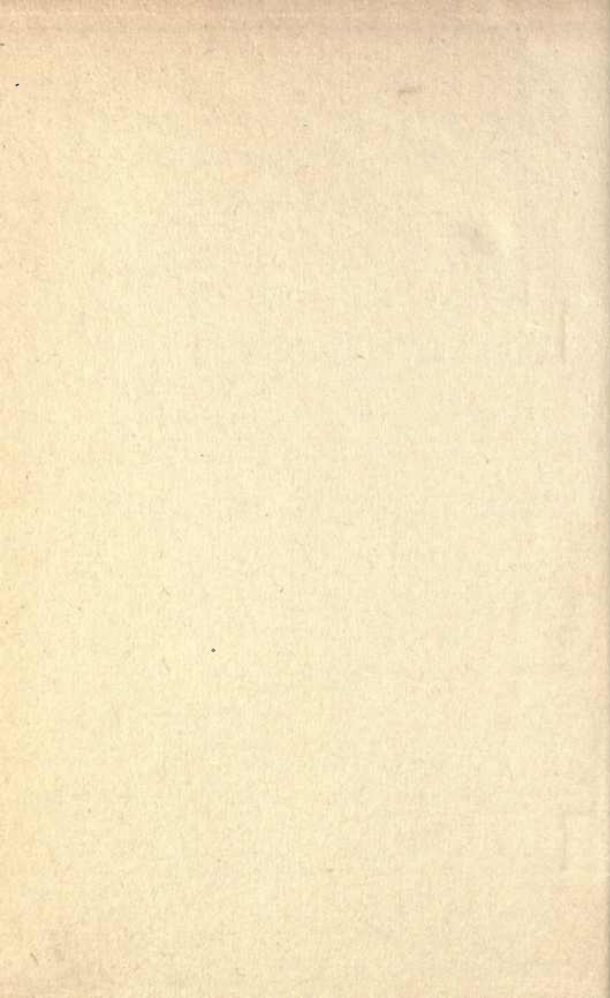
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